ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Mining the Museum and the Deconstruction of The Maryland Historical Society

Name of degree candidate: Michele Moure

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Thesis directed by: Professor John Caughey, Department of American Studies

This thesis considers Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson (1992-93) and the exhibitions's critical impact on the Maryland Historical Society. A brief consideration of contemporary cultural theory, its relationship to revisions in current museological practices and a summary of the history of the American museum provides a context for this case study.

Charged with the collection, interpretation, and exhibition of our cultural heritage, the practices and governing policies of American museums are a continuation of those developed in Europe over 200 years ago. In particular, the museum classification system for objects and cultures, based on an Enlightenment system of knowledge, has perpetuated an exclusionary set of practices, which have marginalized the working class, women, ethnic minorities, and Native Americans. Mining the Museum both reflects and responds to this condition while critically questioning the authority of the museum to define truth as it pertains to our arts, culture and history.

Will Wilson's installation have a lasting influence? Through this examination and consideration of selected responses from the profession, the press, and the public, it will be shown how Mining the Museum has impacted the Maryland Historical Society and how this impact could influence the future of this and other similar institutions.

MINING THE MUSEUM AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

by

Michele Moure

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Advisory Committee:

Professor John Caughey, Chairman/Advisor
Professor Myron Lounsbury
Professor Ira Berlin

DEDICATION

To my family and friends who maintained faith in me,
encouraging me from the beginning and enduring
patiently through the completion

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"The problem is not changing people's consciousness -or what's in their heads - but the political, economic and institutional regime of the production of truth."

Michel Foucault

"What was once buried and taken for granted in America is now made visible for inspection and for criticism."

Gene Wise

INTRODUCTION

The American museum is in a state of crisis. Recent critical scholarship across the humanistic disciplines has challenged traditional museum practices and ideologies as no longer reflecting or supporting the American culture they represent. One has only to open any professional journal to find the debates which are raging between those who accept the status quo and those who, looking at museums' long history of exclusionary practices, demand revision of those practices. This challenge to the status quo is a response to a history of division, exclusion, elitism, and exoticism and has its roots in Postmodern theoretical discourse drawing upon Marxist/feminist criticism and the proliferation of the writings of European culture theorists. It has also been galvanized by the practical considerations produced by a reduction in resources, changing audience demographics, the increased demand for equal representation by ethnic minorities and native populations, and persistent challenges to the freedom of expression guaranteed by the first amendment.

Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson, which reflects and responds to this discourse, has joined in the challenge. Conceived of and initiated by The Museum for Contemporary Arts (known as The Contemporary)[1] Mining the Museum critically

[1]The Contemporary, incorporated in 1989, is a museum which links the art of our time to everyday life. Presenting exhibitions and programs in unusual settings, The Contemporary confronts head-on the definition of what a museum is and what its relationship to art, the artist, the community, and the profession should be. The museum functions with a full-time staff of two, a part-time assistant, and volunteers. The staff curates exhibitions, featuring the work of nationally recognized artists, which challenge specific museum practices. They also develop a process to carry out their unique public programs and presentation concepts, unique to that exhibition. The Board currently has seventeen members and the Artistic Director reports to and sits on the Board.

questions the authority of museums as powerful social institutions to represent "truth" as it pertains to our arts, culture, and history. And, in order to best present that challenge, the opening of Mining the Museum was coincided with the largest ever annual gathering of museum professionals, the 1992 American Association of Museums[2] Conference in Baltimore Maryland. This thesis will present a brief historical perspective outlining the relationship between the development of American museums and the emergence of an elitist, exclusionary, powerful structure which has, in part, defined the environment into which Mining the Museum entered. A case study will critically discuss Mining the Museum, and the exhibition's impact on the site of its presentation, the Maryland Historical Society,[3] a somewhat typical history museum which sought to resolve its epistemological, financial, and ethical dilemmas through participation in this unique collaborative endeavor.

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[2]The American Association of Museums is a national organization for the museum profession. The Association, founded in 1906, has 2,300 member organizations (e.g., zoos, historical societies, art museums, arboreta, and science centers) and 8,000+ individual members. Accreditation, "the establishment of and maintenance of professional standards and the qualitative evaluation..." (p. 9) of museums began in 1970 and is the primary responsibility of AAM. AAM also publishes a bi-monthly magazine (Museum News) and a newsletter (Aviso) and serves as an advocate for museum interests. The annual conference brings together professionals to debate critical issues pertinent to museum development, programming, conservation, management, and physical operations. See the AAM Professional Standards for Museum Accreditation for complete information on the AAM Accreditation Program.

[3]The Maryland Historical Society was founded in 1844 as a members only society. The original emphasis was on the library and archive; it currently houses an exemplary collection of historical documents, books, and manuscripts in its library. The MHS has two floors of permanent exhibition space with two galleries for changing exhibitions. It maintains a large collection of fine decorative arts (e.g, furniture, silver, linens, china, glassware), and numerous artworks and artifacts donated primarily by its membership. The Board's committee structure continues to oversee the activities of MHS; the Executive

Chapter I

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Though it is not the purpose of this paper to enter into a lengthy description of the concepts of European cultural theory, or to investigate "the debt to feminism and to the women's movement which initially raised the issues of subjectivity and representation that now serve as the basis for the more generalized critique of power raised in cultural theory,"[4] it is important to comprehend how integral this theoretical discourse has become to the study not only of our American museums but to all humanistic disciplines. Led primarily by the French, including, among others, the work of semioticians such as Roland Barthes, structuralists Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser, post-structuralists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault the resultant theoretical construction, "Post-modernism," questions and deconstructs agendas and existing paradigms and recognizes that it will be displaced by the next academic, theoretical construction. Within Postmodernism, neutrality does not exist on any level, not even personally, and not in any historical moment, nor within any artifact, artwork, or text. Instead, these events, objects, and individuals are "read" as confluences of multiple forces: social, political, psychological, and aesthetic, which act on both the object and the viewer simultaneously.

Thus, from this perspective, one can no longer consider history as a linear compilation of great events or great works; everyday life and public/private relationships are now seen as part of historical fact and objects, texts, and events are "read" or revisioned with new relevance or meaning. All meanings are seen to be contingent on other meanings; the "West" is understood because there exists and there is an understanding of the "Other." Western cultural "'humanism' which [has] present[ed] the experiences

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Director reports directly to the Board.

[4]George Lipsitiz, "Listening to Learn: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory and American Studies," American Quarterly, December, 1990, p. 620.

of modern Europeans and North Americans as 'human,' while dismissing ... the rest of the world as ... undifferentiated 'other.'"[5] can no longer be accepted practice.

"Foucault's search in the historical record avoids acceptance of taken-for-granted truths, thus discovering previously ignored or neglected beliefs and the practical consequences to which they lead."[6] He saw historical events as constructions, ruptures, in which new systems of knowledge broke with the status quo. Foucault also saw truth and power as closely related. He regarded "'[t]ruth' [as being] linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A 'regime' of truth"[7] "which organize[s] the relations between knowledge and action."[8] There is not a distinction "between truth (e.g., real, scientific, empirically verifiable, etc.) and fiction (made up, invented, wished...) but, rather, between truth and error...."[9] The problem as Foucault saw it was "not changing people's consciousness - or what's in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth."[10]

> For example, in his seminal work, Orientalism, Edward Said states The Orient is an idea that has a history, and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus supportand, to an extent, reflect each other.[11] The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to

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[5]Cary Nelson, Paula Treicher, and Lawrence Grossberg, Cultural Studies, eds. et al, (New York: Routledge, 1992) p. 4.
[6]Robert Wuthnow, James Davison Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, "The Neo-Structuralism of Michel Foucault," Cultural Analysis (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Inc., 1984) p. 141.
[7]Paul Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p. 74.
[8]Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies," Nelson, et al., p. 32.
[9]Arnold Krupat, Ethno-Criticism: Ethnography, History, Literature, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) p. 60.
[10]Rabinow, p. 74.
[11]Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) p.5

> define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.[12]

Yet, a commitment to a pluralist or multicultural[13] perspective and the resultant changes "...to the curriculum or the canon in the name of 'diversity' or 'tolerance'" [which might] urge deconstruction of all dichotomized paradigms of the us/them, West/Rest type...."[14] have not gone unchallenged and can be noted in the number of critics who have spoken out against any intellectual or social redirection, reinterpretation, or rejection of the existing canon. Known as the "Killer B's," William Bennett, Allan Bloom and Saul Bellow are, as described by Henry A. Giroux, representative of the conservative

> 'new elitists [who would] rewrite the past and construct the present from the perspective of the privileged and the powerful. They disdain the democratic implications of pluralism and argue for a form of cultural uniformity in which difference is consigned to the margins of history or to the museum of the disadvantaged.'[15]

One has only to read H. W. Janson, whose History of Art is a primary text for undergraduate students, and who continues to support intolerance and racism through statements such as the following passage from his 1986 revised edition.

> 'Primitive' is a somewhat unfortunate word... Still, no other single term will serve us better. Let us continue, then, to use primitive as a convenient label for a way of life that has passed through the Neolithic Revolution but

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[12]Said, p. 1-2.

[13] It is from the early writings of feminist art historians and critics, that one finds the first nods to the concept of "multiculturalism." Interchangeable with various terms such as "cross-cultural" or "transcultural" or "intercultural", (Lucy R. Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America, p. 17.) "multicultural" has not, 20 years later, been clearly defined and remains a euphemistic and often confusing term. "Multicultural" is used to refer to an expansive, global society in which all cultures are represented, including the Anglo-European, and to issues of gender, sexuality and class, i.e., difference. But it is also conservatively used as a semantic avoidance. It has been referred to as a "disuniting" force, a form of cultural segregation, and as intellectually foppish. (Paul Lippert, "The Semantics of Multiculturalism", Et cetera, pp. 363-374.) While not a cultural theory, "multiculturalism" (and its divergent definitions) is a term inextricably linked to the examination of the state of museums at the end of the 20th Century.

[14]Krupat, p. 15.

[15]John Searles, "The Storm Over the University," The New York Review, December 6, 1990, p. 34.

shows no signs of evolving in the direction of 'historic' civilizations.[16]

Contrast that statement to the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. to understand what is at stake in this academic debate between inclusion and exclusion

> 'The teaching of literature [has become] the teaching of an aesthetic and political order, in which no women and people of color were ever able to discover the reflection or representation of their images, or hear the resonance of their cultural voices. The return of 'the' canon, the high canon of Western masterpieces, represents the return of an order in which my people were subjugated, the voiceless, the invisible, the unrepresented, and the unrepresentable. Who would return us to that medieval never-never land?'[17]

Contemporary culture studies and its continued theoretical discourse are "committed to the study of the range of society's arts, beliefs, institutions and communicative practices"[18] and, in particular, the deconstruction of "historical knowledge as a way of reclaiming an identity for subordinate groups."[19] It is from within this deconstruction and through a comprehension of the "regime" of the production of truth that the criticisms of museums are supported, particularly concerning issues of representation.

Through Postmodernism, a theoretical critique of representation,[20] "popular culture has become a crucial site for the construction of social identity"[21] tying together "high" and "low" culture through a continuum of discourse between the marginalized and the mainstream. For, while museums have been perceived as

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[16]Sally Price, Primitive Art in Civilized Places, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 1.
[17]Searles, p. 35.
[18]Nelson, p. 4.
[19] Henry Giroux, Nelson, et al., p. 202. Note: Giroux's word but my emphasis. It should be noted that terms such as "subordinate" and "minority", etc., imply, conversely, "dominant" and "majority" alternatives, yet, they are in common usage and will be used throughout this thesis as definition of "other than white."
[20]Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward A Theory of Postmodernism," Beyond Recognition: Representation, Appropriation, and Power," Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 110.
[21]Nelson, p. 4

> ...theoretically democratic and open to everyone...[they] have proved in practice to be remarkably productive technology for the development of those practices of social distinction whereby...the dominant class [has] sought to display those principles of taste and forms of demeanor which symbolically police the boundary lines between themselves and the unrulier members of the popular classes. It is the tension thus produced between what the museum is in theory and what it is in practice that accounts for the emergence of politics of access vis-a-vis the museum - that is, for the unending...demand that museums develop more democratic profiles of public use and access.[22]

This discourse/demand has resulted in several shifts aimed at changing museum standards and practices, primarily those concerning "issues of power, cultural democracy, and self-definition [as they] pertain to..." display and interpretation, audience/-participation, and shared governance and resources.[23] It has served to empower those marginalized by the mainstream to "create self-definitions [which are] at the heart of the struggle [for representation]."[24] It has resulted in the serious reconsideration of main-stream ideas of "quality" thus causing "questioning, criticizing, deconstructing, and perhaps even dismantling [of] the canon, which is based on the idea of universal and absolute judgements...."[25] The "[c]overtly racist equa[tion] of racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity with the abandonment of standards of 'quality'...[is] a central issue..."[26] with which museums must contend. It can no longer be assumed that the museum's presentation of historical truth will go unchallenged by those "constituencies historically associated with [the] critical examination of the myths and realities of American culture -

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[22]Bennett, p. 30.
[23]Amalia Mesa-Bains, "The Real Multiculturalism: A Struggle for Authority and Power," Different Voices: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Framework for Change in American Art Museums, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museum Directors, 1992), p. 89.
[24]Mesa-Bains, p. 88.
[25]Marcia Tucker, "'Who's on First?' Issues of Cultural Equity in Today's Museums," Different Voices: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Framework for Change in American Art Museums, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museum Directors, 1992), p. 13.
[26]Tucker, p. 18.

women, ethnic minorities, and the working class."[27]

By acting, by deconstructing the museum through an understanding of "representation...as an apparatus of power,"[28] by assuming the right to self-define, by challenging the status quo, the canon, the great works/great men theory, by displacing the concepts of "quality," empiricism, and absolute truths, the maintenance of power shifts, too. Craig Owen purports (in accordance with Foucault and Louis Marin) that

> representation [is] not simply a manifestation or expression of power, but [should be investigated] as an integral part of the social process of differentiation, exclusion, incorporation, and rule...to expose the ways in which domination and subjugation are inscribed within the representational systems of the West. Representation, then, is not - nor can it be - neutral; it is an act - indeed, the founding act - of power in our culture."[29]

It is recognized through the discourse surrounding issues of representation and power that the "mechanisms of representation contain covert as well as overt ideological messages."[30] In presenting just one view of history, one interpretation of historical truth, museums have heretofore ignored or subjugated these ideological messages in favor of controlling meaning. "The person who [or institution which] represents the world is transformed into a transcendent, objective Mind that appropriates reality for itself and, by appropriating it, dominates it."[31] The museum is thus the apparatus of power, a "product of a systematic activity of restriction and exclusion engineered to control the production of knowledge in our society[,] ...work[ing] to legitimize and perpetuate the hegemony of Western European culture."[32]

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[27]Lipsitiz, p. 617.
[28]Owen, p. 104
[29]Owen, p. 91.
[30]Lipsitz, p. 617.
[31]Owen, p.104.
[32]Owen, p. 92-93.

Mining the Museum challenged the "regime of truth," the museum as an apparatus of power, as the controller of the production, presentation, and interpretation of knowledge, and deconstructed the site, the practices, and the process to offer an alternative, to move beyond discourse to put theory into practice. To adapt Gene Wise's insight, "What was once buried [in the stacks, archives, policies, and practices of the Maryland Historical Society,] and taken for granted [has] now [been] made visible for inspection and for criticism."[33]

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[33]Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," American Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1979, p. 335.

Chapter II

THE CHANGING GUARD

The environment in which Mining the Museum was created is one which has seen great technical and stylistic advancement but little philosophical change within the politics of representation and display. Museums in America have been impacted by the ebb and flow of social, economic, and political phenomena, the changing demographics and ensuing shifts in cultural and moral standards, and the development of the humanistic disciplines. Yet, museums, charged with the collection, interpretation, and exhibition of our cultural heritage, have been functioning within a two hundred year old canon founded on a distinctly European, Enlightenment system of knowledge. And, based on this canon, they have adapted an exclusionary set of policies and practices which have marginalized populations based on gender, religion, race, sexual preference, class - on difference. It is this marginalized population which has led the assault by demanding a move to social awareness through the repatriation of stolen objects and accountability for how public dollars are spent on programs and acquisitions, by questioning institutions' governance and management, by redefining "audience" and insisting that the museum be responsive to the changing dynamics of the broader American society.

Within the different genres of museums (e.g., art museum, history museum, historical society, anthropology/ethnography museum, natural history museum, science/technology museum) there exists a wide variance of priorities. For some, the emphasis is on collecting and displaying, for others it is on research. While collections in some museums are strictly limited to a period or discipline or type of object, other collections concentrate on geographic specificity or a universal generality. Until well into the second half of the twentieth century, the professionalism of museum staff was equally as varied. Museum professionals were trained anthropologists, historians, art historians,

amateurs or volunteers, or wealthy connoisseurs or dilettantes; most had little or no formal or academic training in the conservation, handling, or display of artifacts. Instead, being influenced by different humanistic disciplines, they followed established precedents, or practices determined by each museum. "They faced many problems, [lack of conservation skills and equipment, the need for physical space, lack of funds, competition for acquisitions]...but self-confidence about their mission and their authority did not constitute one of their dilemmas."[34]

America's first museums were loosely considered to be natural history museums though they often displayed artwork and carried out physical science experiments as well. The consistency which can be most clearly noted in all museums, however, is the use of the Enlightenment canon as expressed in the Linnaean classification system. Basically a natural history system (reinforced by the Enlightenment identification of the great "civilizations" and the Darwinian theory of evolution), it places lower life forms at the distant end of a linear hierarchy from the "great men/great works," the "primitive" and all other non-white, non-Western, non-male artifacts, artists, and beliefs exist below the pinnacle owned by the Western white male. According to nineteenth century British collector and ethnographer, Pitt Rivers, who had been greatly influenced by phrenology, Darwinian theory, and archeology, and whose theory of museology partly affected the display of the Smithsonian collection, "all we know is that the fundamental rule of the game is 'sequence.' What he sought to establish [in his museum] was 'the sequence of ideas by which mankind has advanced from the condition of the lower animals.'"[35] From the earliest American museum to contemporary museums of all disciplines, this linear hierarchy has been at the foundation of the practices which are under fire within today's

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[34]Neil Harris, "Museums: The Hidden Agenda," Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 138.
[35]Stocking, p. 31.

American museums.

In 1786, Charles Willson Peale opened his first museum. Sometimes known as "The Philadelphia Museum" or "Peale's Museum," his primary interest was in education[36]. His concerns in the eighteenth century were much the same as museum directors must consider today: How to best preserve and display artifacts; how to acquire earned income and/or public support; how best to educate the audience; and how to compete in a changing market. Not only were Peale's practical concerns much the same as today's but his interpretation and application of the Linnaean classification system became the mode for the profession as well.

Peale collected specimens representing the natural world, objects which reflected the patriotic history of America, and some paintings and sculpture. Following an evolutionary hierarchy, and using "comprehensive labels above the exhibition cases with captions in Latin, French, and English,"[37] Peale presented his collection in accordance with the theories and philosophies of his world; a world moving from the high ideals of the Enlightenment to the idyllic utopias of Romanticism. The giant mastodon skeleton, the expansive collection of taxidermy - birds and animals, and the drawings of plants were juxtaposed with paintings and busts of famous, patriotic men - the lowest life forms in cases nearest the floor and the "great men" nearest heaven.

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[36]Education was important to all museums throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many cases, it was their primary reason for existing. The current revival in educational programs within museums is the result of among other things, outside pressures and the museums' search for relevance in today's society. The leader in educational programming, though not without their detractors, is the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and the J. Paul Getty Museum. See their 1991 publication, Insights: Museums, Visitors, Attitudes, Expectations, A Focus Group Experiment.

[37]Edward P. Alexander, "Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: An exhibition of the Evolution of Early American Museums," Mermaids, Mummies and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum, ed. William T. Alderson, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1992) p. 19.

Peale's museum came into being when American's felt virtuous, when the natural world was held in great awe. His exhibitions were "to please and entertain the Public [which he hoped would] thereby be gratified in the sight of the many Wonderful Works of Nature...."[38] They were billed as moral and for "family viewing,"[39] but as educational as Peale's collection was, fiscal reality required that entertainment also be available. Natural oddities, exotic or deformed animals and human beings, great panoramic paintings depicting glorious battles and biblical scenes, and magicians and performers were presented by Peale to audiences for a small fee.

These "wonders" competed with other forms of amusement available to the early Americans. Waxworks became very popular and vied with museums and street carnivals for the entertainment money being spent. Social lessons were taught by presenting not only didactic, moralizing exhibitions but also objects such as

> a wax figure resembling a 'FEMALE NEGRO well known to the public in the streets of this city, and remarkable for her respectful salutations of those she meets.' No doubt the person depicted was a slave frequently seen in the city market whose positive outlook seemed to justify the 'peculiar institution' of slavery. Children could learn more from an afternoon spent viewing such a figure than a dozen lectures on their society's values could teach them.[40]

There became an ever increasing thinness to the line which separated the exhibition from entertainment. With the new interest in the mysteries of the physical sciences and the curiosities of living oddities,

> [m]anagers of so called freak exhibits and pseudoscientific machinations took advantage of the public's interest in nature and scientific laws.

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[38]Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and Toby A. Appel, eds., The Selected Papers of Charles Wilson Peale and His Family, (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983),
p. 448.
[39]Patricia C. Click, "Enlightened Entertainment: Educational Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore," Maryland Historical Magazine, Vol. 85, Spring, 1990, p. 2.
[40]Click, p. 2.

> Language couched in semi-technological or biological terms attracted attention, but exhibits, especially when organized in grand circus style, bedazzled the audience.[41]

Peale's concept of "museum" became linked to "amusement" and thus began to lose its credibility. Though Walt Disney, a little more than 100 years later, was to prove that blurring of the boundaries between the museum and the carnival would have great marketing potential, for the first half of the nineteenth century, crossing these boundaries spelled the end of the universal museum wherein art, science, and history created an interdisciplinary, if not controlled, dialogue. By 1850, Peale was dead, P. T. Barnum had bought the museum's collection and the very concept of "history museum" had taken a decidedly different turn.

Other institutions developed and flourished, however. The first historical societies came into being between the openings of Peale's museum in Philadelphia and its counterpart in Baltimore. The Massachusetts Historical Society (1791), the New York Historical Society (1804), and the American Antiquarian (1812) quickly moved to separate themselves from the image created by Peale, collecting only books, coins, statuary, and paintings. Staffed by volunteer "amateur" historians and founded to preserve the heritage of the elite families, historical societies did not advertise elaborate displays but served as lyceum for their members, a membership which was, in practice, restricted.

The Maryland Historical Society was incorporated in 1844 and, not unlike other societies, served an elite, male membership. The new Society's charter charged it with the collection of documents about Maryland: Public records, published articles, and treaties; memoirs, speeches or papers "in reference to any remarkable event or character, especially biographical memoirs and anecdotes of distinguished persons...;" autographs and coins;

[41]Click, p. 10

religious and Indian War narratives; histories of "colonization, slavery and abolition;" Indian artifacts "...and any facts or reasoning that may illustrate the doubtful question of the origin of the North American tribes;" genealogies, maps, court and agricultural records; and natural history specimens. The Historical Society members served on committees to manage its governance, library, gallery, etc., and donated objects which validated their positions, their ranking in society, and their deeds. And, as is the practice today, the members were even guaranteed that their name would be prominently displayed beside the objects they donated.[42]

The Society's exhibitions of specimens, artifacts, and artwork, filled a gap left in the cultural world of the city by the closing of Baltimore's Peale Museum. They were presented, however, only for the membership, with the caution issued by the Committee of the Gallery that the artwork "...should not detract from the interests of the Library: that the members of the Society should not be drawn from their seats ...to lounge among the pictures of the adjacent room."[43]

From its inception, the Maryland Historical Society presented and published lectures for its membership. Though one of the earliest papers presented was a memoir of astronomer, Benjamin Banneker (an African American), most celebrated Maryland patriots and founders, reveled in nature, or discussed social issues. An annual report from 1850 calls for papers on

> ...themes which would very properly come within the range of [the member's] pursuits...Among them might be a memoir on the Benevolent Institution of the State. This is especially an Anglo-Saxon province, for, of all the races of man, no other has done so much, or is nowdoing [sic.] so much as is this, towards ameliorating the conditions of his fellows."[44]

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[42]MHS Annual Report, 1850, Extract from the Society's Circular Letter, p. 15 - 17.
[43]MHS 1850 Annual Report, p. 5.
[44]MHS 1850 Annual Report, p. 11.

One distinguishing point of interest about the founders of the Society is their link to the Maryland Colonization Society and the Maryland in Liberia settlement which may possibly account for the number of published articles about slavery and colonization within the archive.

In 1835, possibly the first great philanthropic gesture to the world of American museums came when James Smithson donated $500,000 to the United States government "'to found at Washington, under the name of Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.'"[45] A political struggle ensued during which time the value of research over that of display became the primary point of contention in deciding how to use Smithson's bequest. The Smithsonian Institution was founded in 1846, containing artifacts and books for serious study, not "to gratify an unenlightened curiosity."[46] The first executive secretary, Joseph Henry, though adamantly opposed to having the Smithsonian manage a museum, was seen to have been influenced by Peale's early interests as was the "embryonic research [being done] in American natural history, cultural anthropology, the history of technology, and art history."[47]

The second half of the nineteenth century saw broad social/philosophical changes. The increase in "leisure" time as agrarian America gained membership in the industrial world led to an expansion of knowledge. Along with the first great influx of immigrants,

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[45]Gary Kulick, "Designing the Past: History Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment, eds., Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) p. 7.
[46]Lawrence W. Levine, "The Sacralization of Culture," Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 157.
[47]Thomas Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies in America, 1876-1976," Material Culture Studies in America: An Anthology, (Nashville: The American Association of State and Local History, 1982), p. 9.

a white middle class emerged. Anglo Americans experienced an increase in personal wealth, philanthropic giving expanded, and the development of capitalism further divided the classes. American man began to feel a domination of the physical world, thus creating a wider distinction between the Eurocentric civilized man of the West and the peoples of the exotic non-west. These changes in the social, economic, and political structure of America also brought on a national anxiety.[48] Fearing that their past was being lost to them and the future of "America" as they had known it was being threatened, the wealthy instituted a campaign to glorify and preserve history as they saw it. These efforts resulted in the opening of numerous museums, societies, and libraries. By the early twentieth century, every major city and most major universities had a museum.

During the forty-four years from the time of Smithson's bequest to the opening of the first of the Smithsonian museums, some of the museums incorporated included the Museum at Hampton Institute (Hampton, VA, 1868), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City, 1869) and the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, 1870). While considering the very viewing of the objects in its collection of benefit "to all classes of people," Mayor Cobb, during the dedication ceremony of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, stated that the museum would "be a favorite resort of the cultured few who find a supreme delight in the finer creations in art."[49] "Dress codes were enforced ... and more efforts were made to discipline parts of the audience [e.g. the working class] than to provide a setting for relaxed viewing."[50] As Neil Harris points out, "the exhibitions, the lectures and educational programs, all reflected social policy."[51] It was believed that the aged objects

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[48]Harris, pp 134-35
[49]Neil Harris, "A Historical Perspective on Museum Advocacy," Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) p. 85.
[50]Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, "Communities and Museums: Partners in Crisis," Museum News, May/June, 1993, p. 79.
[51]Harris, p. 85.

and reproductions of European masterpieces in the museums possessed power and expressed truths "which have proved capable of moulding the minds and purposes of generation after generation."[52]

The Hampton University Museum, incorporated one year before the Metropolitan Museum of Art, exhibited a collection of African objects for a primarily African American audience. The museum was founded to house artifacts which were used in hands-on instruction and to educate the students of the, then, all black Hampton Institute. The ever expanding collection of objects came from missionaries, primarily one of the first African American missionaries to go to Africa, Dr. William H. Sheppard, an alumni of Hampton Institute, and were seen to be

> "'a great aid to respect of the race to find their [sic.] ancestors capable of the taste and skill exhibited by the articles that have come from the hand of African men and women ...They [the students] are proud to learn that working in iron places at least one African tribe high up on the accepted scale of civilization.'"[53]

As opposed to the African objects being viewed as distant, unfamiliar, and exotic, they became an extension of a personal cultural experience, and "a powerful resource that helped to develop a strong self-image, as the rich and beautiful objects generated admiration and respect for the people who made and used them."[54]

Through the nineteenth century and into the 1920's, the museum was also the only museum open to blacks in the South. In addition, Hampton Institute and the museum became one of the first multicultural educational environments, later incorporating Native

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[52]Harris, p. 85.
[53]Jeanne Zeidler and Mary Lou Hultgren, "Things African Prove to be the Favorite Theme: The African Collection at Hampton University," ART/Artifact: African Art in Anthology Collections, (New York: The Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988) p. 103.
[54]Zeidler and Hultgren, p. 103.

American students into its student body and Native American artifacts into its collection. The long and distinguished history of the Hampton University Museum parallels those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian museums, the Boston Museum of Fine Art, among others, with the exception that, while Hampton presented African and Native American art and artifacts within a context which did not place it in relationship to Western civilization, the other museums still place all art and artifacts within this context.

In 1876, George Brown Goode, the Smithsonian's first bureau director (curator), premiered the national collection at the centennial celebration in Philadelphia, but it was not until 1879 that the collection came together and opened in Washington as the U. S. National Museum. Using arcane language, cluttered display techniques, and the a contemporized version of the classification system Peale used, the Smithsonian set the standard for museums of the near future. Natural science and cultural anthropology were of primary interest with history being a distant concern. Goode collected artifacts which explained and glorified nature and served as exemplars of the evolution of the species. He saw no connection between what the museum was doing and the texts in which academic historians were interested. The Smithsonian did not even hire anyone with a Ph.D in history until after World War II.[55]

Though museums such as the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan greatly influenced the development of other institutions within their disciplines, other displays in the form of grand fairs also contributed to the developing body of knowledge about the world. In addition, they were blatant "...exercises in cultural propaganda, underwriting a special kind of racism."[56] The emergence of the "exposition" in the mid-nineteenth century had

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[55]Kulik, p. 12.
[56]Harris, p. 86.

an "ideological impact [that] was profound and permanent."[57] They functioned as huge open-air museums with carnival attachments. The expositions "embodied...two aspects: [the] display of industrial achievement and promise for the regional or national metropolis, and exhibits of the primitive 'others' collected from peripheral territories or colonies...[and presented as an] illustrated encyclopedia of humanity."[58] The touring of human subjects was not new. Unlike the Barnum side-show, however, the exposition was intended to have an ethnographic value which had not been seen in the earlier human displays, but which was to justify the living dioramas by attaching an educational value to them.

After the French Revolution, the Louvre, once the repository for the royal art collection, became a public institution and was made available to the now free population of France. Very early in the nineteenth century the museum was "reinstalled" classifying the artwork and artifacts in accordance with the new discipline of art history. The history of art - primarily understood as the history of artists - demonstrated the claim that history was the history of great men. The museum, organized as an art-historical monument, not only made this claim visible, it also enforced it as a universal truth: as defined by art history, art could speak *only* of individual genius and achievement. The museum thus institutionalized the bourgeois claim to speak for the interests of all mankind.[59]

Civilization's great epochs were interpreted as "...the highest achievements of Western civilization itself: its origins in Egypt and Greece, its awakening in the Renaissance, and its flowering in nineteenth-century France."[60] Objects from other "lesser"

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[57]Curtis M. Hinsley, " The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, eds., Ivan Karp and Steven D, Lavine, (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991) p. 344.
[58]Hinsley, p. 345.
[59]Alan Wallach and Carol Duncan, "The Universal Survey Museum," Art History, December, 1980, p.456.
[60]Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and Ritual of Citizenship," Exhibiting Cultures, p. 96.

civilizations, the artifacts and artwork of non-white, non-Western populations, were segregated to other rooms, buildings, or institutions becoming the province of anthropologists and/or natural history museums. The expositions functioned in much the same manner. The grand displays of commercial, historical, and scientific achievement were housed in buildings of splendor funded by corporations and local governments which benefitted by the tourism generated by the fair. Enormous expense went into the production of displays and construction of buildings which, in many cases, stood for only a few months, echoing the expense and temporal nature of blockbuster exhibitions of the mid to late twentieth century.

Segregated from the part of the exposition which glorified Western hegemony and knowledge, the "primitives" were usually placed along the promenade, or within the midway itself, "where they performed as emblematic savages."[61] The expositions reinforced the separateness of the races; the "contemporary aborigines, surviving in a state of 'arrested development,' could serve as living illustrations..."[62] in the evolutionary tableau of the promenade. The human displays were a curiosity, a counterpoint to the great Western achievements just viewed by the audience in the buildings which always preceded the promenade. For the exposition planners, "exotic cultures, however interesting, informative, or varied they may have been, perched more precariously than others on the ladder of human achievement.[63]

And, not unlike the artifacts of non-western cultures which were isolated from the objects of the West, their creators were also removed, through the use of a variety of

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[61]Russ Rymer, "Darwinism, Barnumism and Racism," The New York Times Book Review, September 6, 1992, p. 3.
[62]William Ryan Chapman, "Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition, Objects and Others, p. 31.
[63]Harris, "Museums: The Hidden Agenda," Cultural Excursions, p.138.

barriers, from social intercourse with the dominant society. Extreme differences existed in the clothing of the viewer and that of the subject; a distance was maintained by ropes, chains, fences, or by the use of cameras which objectified the subject; the construct of live performance (theater) made the subject less real- less human - and served to further exoticize the subject's life; and the viewer was allowed complete freedom of movement while the subject experienced restricted movement within "compounds or villages;" all worked to physically and psychologically reinforce the ideological distance between the spectator and the subject. The "primitive other-ness" was maintained and the hierarchy was supported as the "natives" toiled or performed or otherwise lived their lives under the gaze of the spectator, who was enjoying his/her leisure.[64]

While American's were exoticizing the East - Asia, Africa, the Orient - Europeans were looking to the America's, particularly Central and South America. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the first ever Pre-Columbian exhibition was held in Paris. Maintaining the Western view of "culture" and "civilization," Henri de Longperier wrote that there was a

> paucity of information available to scholars, but suggested that the lack of interest in the Americas was not surprising since their past was not, like the Egyptian, closely tied to Europe's own 'sacred history.' ...'Because their [physiological] organization' seemed to have 'denied them that impulse toward the beautiful that alone en genders progress,' [they created] 'bizarre combinations' of form and ideas.[65]

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[64]In an ironic twist, when one "exotic," Ota Benga, returned to the Congo with the man who originally took him to America, Samuel P. Verner, Benga recreated the experience for his countrymen. "...[T]hey built a diorama in a wooden pen and installed in it Verner, who rocked in his chair and smoked his pipe, read and listened to recordings on an Edison phonograph while the natives gawked. 'What is [Verner] doing in there?' the tribesmen [asked] ..., 'He is being Batwa...You are watching him being muzungu [a white]. Now do you understand what happened there [1904 St. Louis World's Fair]?'" See Rymer, "Darwinism, Barnumism, and Racism."

[65]Elizabeth A. Williams, "Art and Artifact at the Trocadero: Ars Americana and the Primitivist Revolution," Objects and Others, p. 150.

Though Europeans and North Americans were supporting each other's right to "assume the responsibility for the definition, conservation, interpretation, marketing, and future existence of the world's art [and artifacts],"[66] America was entering a period of strong nationalism. Brought on by the expansion of immigration into the country, Americans began to look toward themselves and their cultural achievements as being equal to those of Europeans. Two distinct occurrences changed how American's viewed cultural artifacts: the epistemological change which recategorized artifacts, and the emergence of nationalism and the "common man." Granted, these were not isolated "events" and the effects on the museum field were uneven, but they encapsulate the dynamics of the early twentieth century museum.

James Clifford sees "authenticity, value, and circulation of artifacts and data [as being controlled by an] art-culture system." creating "metahistories" in which "what is worthy" is "valued and redeemed" while all else slips into a common destiny."[67] He describes eighteenth century "art" as being equated with skill and "culture" with that which developed naturally. An artist was a painter, as well as a cabinetmaker or shipwright. The nineteenth century saw "art" being equated with genius, a shift to the "domain of creativity," while "culture" reinforced art by closely paralleling it and identifying that which was "uncommon, essential, precious."[68] The work of the "common man" was viewed as labor - necessary - while the efforts of the "artist" reflected the highest natural order - the results of which were to be appreciated and owned by the elite (but this did not necessarily elevate the status of the artist her/himself). An additional shift saw categories such as "antiquities, exotic curiosities, Orientalia, etc, emerge, by the end of the century, as

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[66]Sally Price, Primitive Art in Civilized Places, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 69.
[67]James Clifford, "The Pure Products Go Crazy," The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, James Clifford, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) p. 13.
[68]Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," The Predicament of Culture, p. 233.

"primitive" art.

This separation of the artifact into either the aestheticized art object or the scientific, ethnographic specimen was the result of the advent of modernism and anthropology.[69] By the early twentieth century, "primitive" art was "equal in aesthetic and moral value" to Western art[70] but was, nonetheless, interpreted through Western meaning. Culture (with a small "c") "emerged as [an anthropological term,] a liberal alternative to racist classification of human diversity."[71] The Armory Show in New York in 1913 served to introduce a broader public to African art but only through the aestheticization of the objects by the Cubists who appropriated their forms; there was little or no understanding of their meaning - their "African-ness." Linking African art to this new modernist art movement, caused the Western art to become even more exoticized and art historians resounded "that a genuine cultural revolution had taken place."[72]

After World War I, "there emerged among ethnographers and modernist aesthetes a distinct vision ('ethnographic surrealism') that 'destabilized' such traditional categories of high culture as the opposition between art and artifact."[73] This destabilization led the way to a reconsideration of American artifactual collections and an emergence of not only the highly crafted American object, but also the artifacts of everyday life. It did not eradicate the separation between "high and low", however - that is still in contention today. A response to this shift is seen in the 1909 Metropolitan presentation its first exhibition of American furnishings. Foreshadowing the opening of its American Wing in

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[69]Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," The Predicament of Culture, p. 198.
[70]Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," The Predicament of Culture, p. 235.
[71]Clifford, p. 234.
[72]Harold Rosenberg, Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 162. It should be noted that modernist art historians and critics still perceive this event as a "cultural revolution." But, who's culture, who's revolution?
[73]Stocking, p. 147.

1924, and bringing forward the question of whether American domestic art had a place in the country's great museums; "the wing was a shrine...to the aesthetic taste and sensibility of the old elite."[74] Connoissuership reached an all time high; the exhibition at the Metropolitan resulted in the founding of the Walpole Society, a group of wealthy patrons who collected American decorative arts. For 70 years, this Society's members have remained the major collectors and philanthropic donors in the Northeast, bestowing or bequeathing sophisticated American art and artifacts to museums.[75]

Nationalism was sweeping the country and a strong anti-immigrant sentiment brought about a change in how Americans viewed their common history. "In 1924, the same year the American Wing opened, Congress passed the most restrictive and racist immigration bill in this century."[76] Faced with a burgeoning immigrant population, programs intended to educate the dynamic populace, taught a strident "Americanism," honoring everything American, including patriots, architecture, artifacts, and ideals. Assimilation of the new ethnic population was seen as a priority in order to preserve the "American" way of life. Programs to teach English to the immigrants became a common part of the workplace. One of the most interesting and dramatic events was Henry Ford's staging of the great melting pot performance which had immigrant factory workers, dressed in their native clothes, enter the top of a structure, a huge pot, while co-workers, dressed in Western clothes, emerged at its base waving American flags.

America was becoming a mobile society, courtesy in part to Ford, and the burgeoning outdoor museums and historical sites (e.g., homes of famous men, battlefields, "villages") became destinations for the vacationing middle class, who wit-

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[74]Kulick, p. 16.
[75]Kulick, p. 16.
[76]Kulick, p. 16.

nessed their history represented without any of its blemishes, and for immigrant visitors who were learning the "history" of their new American homeland. Drawing on the nostalgia for a personal history, new history museums opened, representing the "common man," who thus gained in stature through this representation, but not without contradictions, as seen in Henry Ford's museums.

Ford can be attributed with founding one of the first outdoor historical museums on over 2,000 acres in Massachusetts. He even built a highway around his village to avert any sense of contemporary life from the rolling hills and green pastures. His image of American life was one free of crime, dirt, adversity, and disaster. Greenfield Village, also an idyllic, utopian vision of American life, was Ford's second foray into idealizing America's past. As with his Massachusetts village, he moved buildings from all around the country to his site which also included a 14 acre museum housing the totality of American achievement. But unlike the artifacts collected by other museums, Ford eschewed any evidence of the elite. "This museum-hamlet paid homage to... [and] celebrated craft skills and domestic labor, recalled old social customs,...and praised...pioneer virtues of hard work, discipline, frugality, and self-reliance."[77] As Ford became more disillusioned with the real world, he found refuge in his historical retreat that permitted him to "criticize contemporary society without having to examine too closely the part he had played in creating it."[78]

Yet, while "Ford...had grappled with history in the course of mystifying it, [John D.] Rockefeller [in his recreation of Williamsburg] denied that history had ever

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[77]Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, eds., Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 145.
[78]Wallace, p. 146.

happened."[79] Pouring tens of millions of dollars into the restoration of Williamsburg to its earlier colonial grandeur, Rockefeller also idealized history through exclusion -he simply eliminated any evidence of the colonial Black experience. It was not until the 1970's that "slavery was discovered at Williamsburg"[80] and that it was given voice as an acknowledged and legitimate experience in Williamsburg's colonial history, and not until very recently that that voice spoke of the true conditions of being an African American in Colonial Williamsburg. Rockefeller appropriated history and reinterpreted it not only through the established canon but placed it temporally within the Enlightenment period. Williamsburg celebrated the planter elite -great men and their great patriotic deeds - and glorified this past by "...borrow[ing] and display[ing] a historical aura; embodying a vision of a total social order ...[which] flow[ed] from the top down."[81] The "common man" was represented as the artisan, the faithful citizen working to proudly serve the needs of the elite.

These documentations of the past by Ford and Rockefeller, both mythologized, constructed histories, represent a divergence in how history was displayed. In the simplest terms, it placed one interpretation in the hands of the elite and another in the hands of the "common man," with both mediated by the museum. Long extolled as the owners of all that is civilized and cultured, the elite found their "history" in art museums, historical societies, and even in ethnographic or natural history museums which provided a counterbalance and confirmation to their vision. Battlefields became a glorification of great deeds by great men (e.g., the politicians and officers), and by the romanticized, patriotic, common soldier, who reached his own level of exaltation only upon his death in battle. The "common man" also found a home in the outdoor museums, historical sites,

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[79]Wallace, p. 149.
[80]Wallace, p. 156.
[81]Wallace, p. 148

and in museums which idealized past labors, celebrating his (and less often "her") contributions to the making of America. The best known of these, the New York State Historical Association's museum complex in Cooperstown, wanted the visitors, "mostly workers and farmers, ...to go away with a 'new sense of historic importance of the American farmer and the American craftsman.'"[82]

The depression years saw a continued investment in documenting the history of everyday Americans and evidence "...that the state could compete with private capital as guardian of the public memory."[83] Federal programs, initiated by the New Deal administration of Roosevelt, were paramount in the collection of data. The CCC began a building restoration program while artists were put to work writing about American culture and depicting its history in paintings on the walls of municipal buildings and in photographs taken by the Farm Security Administration. The creation of the Index of American Design also employed artists to draw over 20,000 objects exemplifying not only the American contribution to design but also supporting the idea that all objects were of value in understanding our past.[84] Recognizing the passing of a whole generation having first hand knowledge of the Civil War, the Works Project Administration collected slave narratives and oral histories by the war's participants.

Despite the Depression, there was a museum construction boom including the creation of modern buildings and those, such as the National Gallery in Washington DC, which replicated classical architecture.[85] Corporate and individual support of museums

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[82]Kulick, p. 22. The NYSHA Cooperstown complex was to evolve into, among other separate museums, The Farmer's Museum (1945), which plays an important role in the history of history museums including a break with taxonomic representation through the presentation of the first thematic exhibition.
[83]Wallace, p. 149.
[84]Schlereth, p. 1
[85]Schlereth, p. 18-19.

was growing, history museums were rapidly increasing in number, but, aside from a very few exceptions, Americans of color had no place in these new museum buildings or their collections. Nor did they have a place in either set of historical constructs - not being either Anglo American elite or "common." With the exception of the Federal work projects and exhibitions such as "From Slavery to Freedom," (1947) the first history exhibition to integrate Black experience into American political history, most museums did not recognize or present African American history nor collect representative art or artifacts.[86] For the Anglo American museum, there was a distinct separation between the exotic African and the African American and by ignoring the relationship, the history of American slavery and racism could also be ignored. While artifacts of Africa and other non-white, non-Western cultures had moved from the place of ethnographic curiosity to"primitive" art, the art and artifacts of African Americans belonged in neither place. For the most part, objects created by African Americans were donated or sold to museums by other African Americans and went to institutions such as the Hampton Institute, New York Public Library in Harlem, Tuskeegee Institute, Howard University and Atlanta University.

The 1950's and 1960's saw a dramatic change in the museum profession technically and stylistically. In 1955, Walt Disney opened "Disneyland" where cultural and technological history merged with the amusement park. This perfect blending of history, museum, and P. T. Barnum, cleaned up and commodified, became the middle class Coney Island.[87] The Smithsonian began planning for the separation of history from its other collections and, in 1965, opened the National Museum of History and Technology. Thematic exhibitions, introduced by NYSHA's Farmer's Museum's, "The

[86]James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, "Afro-Americans and Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion," History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment, eds., Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 213-219.

[87]Michael Wallace, "Mickey Mouse History," in History Museums in the United States ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 165-166.

Farmer's Year," in 1955, replaced the traditional taxonomic displays left over from the natural history presentations of the nineteenth century.

Charles and Ray Eames introduced a different design form for museum display in keeping with the museums' efforts to be "less forbidding, more interactive, more accessible and democratic."[88] Using the total space - walls, ceiling, floors - and producing non-didactic labels, the technique was criticized because it did not exalt the object. This veneration of the object, its history, and its maker had been at the basis of all museum display of Western culture and the Eames' style sacrificed "object primacy" for theme. This design concept did not, however, make the content of the exhibition more inclusive. The museums were (and are) still presenting objects and history within the context of Western hegemony and the exotic "other."

The advent of the "blockbuster" exhibition in the 1960's saw great thematic collections of art and artifacts accompanied by expensive catalogs and hyped to a public eager for spectacle. Restricted access through ticket sales, long lines, and hours of operation, which were gradually reduced during the 1960's and 70's, only created a greater frenzy for entre' to exhibitions such as MOMA's "Picasso," and the Metropolitan's "Tutankhamen." In addition, great cultural "treasures," such as those of the British Royal Family, were now commodified through the fabrication of reproduction jewelry and objets d'art, tote bags, posters, and notepaper sold in the greatly expanded and modernized museum shops. Museums reinforced their images as treasure houses and even became trend setters with department stores selling related fashions, furniture, jewelry, and linens. As Colonial Williamsburg contributed to the creation of a country of nascent colonial-styled suburbs, museum reproductions, reinforcing Western civilization's achievements, clothed and furnished trend conscious Americans and their homes.

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[88]Kulick, p. 28.

It was during this same period, however, that grassroots efforts to preserve local heritages and the civil rights movement brought about a substantive change; numerous museums and cultural centers opened which addressed urban and rural communities, women, the working class, and ethnic minorities. But, while separate institutions were opened, and a limited number of African American cultural objects were placed in the collections of the dominant institutions, their makers were seldom identified - remaining the anonymous "other" - or an object entered the museum for a token Black History Week/Month show and was quickly removed. By presenting art, artifacts, and history of the "other" in specialized exhibitions such as women's art shows or Native American "culture" shows, the objects became even more exoticized - not part of the dominant culture or history and, thus, caused further marginalization. Not only did the marginalized have no voice in the dominant institutions, their material culture did not become part of permanent collections in mainstream institutions because their aesthetics (their quality), and their history were outside the canon and not part of the modernist paradigm which reigned in museums.

Creation of academic programs and departments for the study of marginalized populations such as women and blacks, and the increased emphasis put on the interdisciplinarity of American Studies, the advancement of popular and material culture studies, the new approaches to anthropology, the advent of a new social history, and the proliferation of Marxist, Feminist, and European culture theory, greatly impacted the museum field. Museums could no longer remain detached social institutions; as bastions of elitism, they were subject to constant assault. They could no longer sustain a posture which held them impervious to social change, charging that there was no scholarly base for inclusion of the culture of the "other." Academe presented a challenge, exposed exclusionary practices, validated the histories, technologies and aesthetics of the "other," and began to train professionals who would later respond critically to the persistent maintenance of the

status quo.

In 1970, the New York Art Strike and the Art Workers Coalition broke into a meeting of the American Association of Museums. Unsatisfied with the token, albeit honest, efforts made by Thomas Hoving at the Metropolitan (Harlem on My Mind exhibition) and the results of the 1969 Neighborhood Museum Seminar, demands were made to convene a special committee to examine the state of museums and their role in society. Hoving had promised "a broad and very deep and continuing re-examination of all [the Metropolitan's] policies,...philosophies,...aims and their day to day practice."[89] The Neighborhood Museum Seminar had come together to discuss racism, cultural identity, and the mistrust minorities had for cultural institutions. But, it was recognized that

> if museums hoped to maintain their importance as cultural institutions, they had to involve the local communities in the process of planning, policy making, [and] program administration...Professionals would have to surrender some control to non-professionals or remain open to charges of promoting white cultural dominance and ignoring minority contributions to American society and culture.[90]

Nothing significant had happened within the profession to address these charges and very public demands were made that the AAM, as the professional association for museums, could not ignore. The demands included the creation of an ad hoc committee which would call a national workshop to examine racism, sexism, repression, and war (the Viet Nam War was still raging and art as political statement was very much a part of the contemporary scene); the creation of internships for women and minorities; and the requirement that museums move toward a greater social awareness in employment, educational programming, and exhibitions.

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[89]Horton/Crew, History Museums in the United States, p. 220
[90]Horton/Crew, History Museums in the United States, p. 221

Most institutions simply ignored the "radicals'" call for greater inclusion. The Philadelphia Museum, however, designed one of the first successful exhibitions to incorporate community participation in all phases of its creation and execution. "Rites of Passage" brought together five communities- Jewish, Italian, African American, Chinese, and Puerto Rican - who selected objects which best exemplified their culture and who placed them in separate exhibitions at community sites. Spurred on by the success of this exhibition and supported by funds from the 1976 Bicentennial Committee, Philadelphia became the first city to invest public funds in the opening of an African American museum -the Afro-American History and Culture Museum.

In 1984-85, six exhibitions opened in New York City, each presenting art and/or artifacts by non-Western cultures. Included among these was the first show of the new Center for African Art and the Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History. Not without their share of criticism, these exhibitions paled in controversy when compared to William Rubin's six year effort to present "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" at the Museum of Modern Art. Opening in the Fall of 1984, the exhibition showed just how little the dominant institutions and their modernist trained art historians understood about issues of representation. "Primitivism" has been hailed as one of MOMA's all time failures by those who responded to the modernist hegemony ensconced at MOMA and the complete lack of regard for post-modernist considerations. It was also hailed as one of MOMA's all time successes by those modernist who relished the opportunity to study the Western masterpieces beside their "affinities."

MOMA published both a small exhibition brochure and an expensive catalog which held often conflicting views in the texts presented. Ignoring issues of colonialism, and "the political consequences of modernism's absorption of African and Oceanic pieces" into

the greater modernist paradigm, Rubin, in his catalog introduction, "says that 'the ethnologists' primary concern [the history, function, and significance of the objects in their contexts of origin] is irrelevant to my topic, except insofar as these facts might have been known to the modern artists in question.'"[91] For Rubin, the non-Western objects had no significance outside of their formal relationship to the Western art to which they were paired. They did not have a context of their own, a history, a value (other than the monetary value placed on them because of their age, scarcity, and exoticism).

Though the word "affinity" "...is a kinship term suggesting a deeper or more natural relationship than mere resemblance or juxtaposition [and] connotes a common quality or essence joining the tribal to the modern,"[92] the difference in how the objects were labeled was very telling of how differently MOMA interpreted their relationship. The objects in the exhibition, both Western and non-Western, were treated as rare and expensive pieces - elevated on pedestals or hung on the walls and lighted dramatically -but, the Western pieces were almost obsessively labeled "sometimes down to the month or week of composition; the primitive objects were labeled by centuries."[93] The modernist "masterpieces" appropriated the history and form of the non-Western object (usually a mask) and reinforced the Western hegemony and the West's role as the "preserv[er], redeem[er], and represent[er]" of a "primitive" world.[94]

Since the mid 1980's, there has been a veritable flood of critical discourse in texts and periodicals, on academic campuses, at conferences, and within museums. MOMA's "Primitivism" exhibition was not the only example of blatant disregard for the culture of

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91 Marianna Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 121-122.
92James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," Art in America, April, 1985, p. 164.
93Torgovnick, p. 121.
94Clifford, Art in America, p. 171.

the "other," but it was one of the catalysts for the discourse becoming more public. Recent attempts by museums to address issues brought forward by this discourse have resulted in some brave attempts and glorious failures. The Decade Show, Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews, The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920, From Parlor to Politics: Women and Reform in America, 1890-1925, First Encounters, and Hispanic Art in the United States, are just a few examples of exhibitions which have revisioned historical truth or confronted issues of representation. Each of these exhibitions has made an important contribution to its particular discipline, adding to the discourse about art, history, and social/political relationships. None of them have been without controversy, being charged with the politicization of history, presenting didactic interpretations and labeling, not taking scholarly risks (the relinquishing of curatorial interpretation to corporate funders' demands), not working with the communities affected by the content of the exhibition or, conversely, pandering to special interests and caving into community pressures, or of being "politically correct"[95] Their funding has been withheld or their audience has left in anger; artists and institutions were claiming that their freedom of expression was being threatened; communities were infuriated by inaccuracies or exclusions; the outrage in Washington, DC, after the opening of The West as America was so ferocious that congressional leaders threatened to withhold the appropriation due the Smithsonian Institution.

Many museums have yet to seriously reconsider, or even initially investigate, their commitment to the established canon and how that commitment impacts their relationship to the community in which they exist. In 1989, The Contemporary was founded and has established its mission and goals in recognition of the need to provide programs which are inclusive, which respond to the relationship of art to everyday life. Holding to its identi-

[95]A charge often used by conservatives to brand a theory, practice, event, or relationship as being "liberal." This comment often has a disquieting influence on discussions of social/political relevance.

fication as a museum and eschewing the idea that it is an alternative art center, it embraces the responsibilities of a museum to exhibit, educate, collect and interpret, though it does so in accordance with its own definitions. Presenting exhibitions in temporary spaces such as an abandoned dance hall, a vacated car dealership, and the back of a pick-up truck, allows The Contemporary to locate itself within communities which are not usually the sites of contemporary art programs. Untraditional audiences are reached not only through the location of the exhibition but also through the preliminary work of community meetings and extensive museum programs. Though the artists are of national reputation, each program is designed to specifically respond to a Baltimore audience.

Founded by George Ciscle, a Baltimore gallery owner and former teacher who serves as the Artistic Director, The Contemporary has its not-for-profit IRS status (501c3) and a board of seventeen of which Ciscle is a voting member. Lisa Corrin, the Assistant Director and curator, is the only other full-time staff. Relying on a part-time assistant (Jed Dodds) and a score of volunteers, the programming done by The Contemporary is ambitious even for a better staffed institution. Attendance at the various exhibitions and educational programs has been steadily increasing as has the mostly positive press coverage. It receives its funding through membership, individual and corporate contributions, state and federal grants, and local and national foundations; it is generously supported by in-kind donations.

While it may seem that theoretical discourse eludes practical application, The Contemporary has steadfastly worked to prove the human side of discourse. Mining the Museum as an exhibition and as a process was an experiment in that practical application. But, Mining the Museum was not planned as a panacea for museums nor was it considered to be the answer to all theoretical or practical issues facing The Contemporary or its collaborator, the Maryland Historical Society. Institutions such as these cannot hope

to solve their financial, ethical or epistemological dilemmas through the presentation of one exhibition. The Maryland Historical Society, celebrating its 150 year anniversary in 1994, is part of and a product of the long history just described, and the Contemporary is a response to that history, a history for which the young institution is writing a new chapter. It is through Mining the Museum that Fred Wilson and The Contemporary have linked museum history to the critical discourse and brought them into the exhibition space of the Maryland Historical Society and said, "Yes, it is possible to reconsider the canon, to create a new paradigm."

Chapter III

A CASE STUDY:

MINING THE MUSEUM: AN INSTALLATION BY FRED WILSON

MINING THE MUSEUM: AN INSTALLATION BY FRED WILSON was a modest contemporary art installation which began as a discussion between George Ciscle and Lisa Corrin as they planned for the upcoming 1992 American Association of Museums conference to be held in Baltimore. Knowing that the conference would bring several thousand museum professionals to the city, The Contemporary, who use the whole city as their "museum," wanted an opportunity to demonstrate their unique perspective on what it means to be a museum.

While preparing to open their second exhibition, a Russian photography exhibit being presented in an old bus garage, The Contemporary was greeted to the neighborhood by the Director of the Maryland Historical Society (MHS), Charles Lyle. During the ensuing weeks, Lyle was able to watch the staff of The Contemporary work and began to admire their fresh approach. In discussion one day, Lyle referred to his desire to reach new audiences and, in particular, to encourage participation by the African American community in MHS programs. Not knowing what lay ahead for them, the two directors passed pleasantries, both saying that it would be interesting to work together some day.

As the next few weeks passed, The Contemporary began to plan seriously for the upcoming conference. Lisa Corrin, Assistant Director and Curator conceived of Mining the Museum after she and Ciscle attended a lecture by Fred Wilson given at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC. The New York artist, whose previous work critiqued museums through mock exhibitions in contemporary art galleries, was getting national reviews for exhibitions he was doing in New York galleries and alternative spaces. Corrin

proposed that The Contemporary bring Wilson to Baltimore. As with all of their exhibitions, it was important that this project in some way relate to the people who lived in the city. Giving Wilson a tour of Baltimore and discussing with him the idea for the project was the first step and the beginning of an exciting collaboration.

Introducing the artists to Baltimore is an integral part of the planning process for The Contemporary. Though their vision for the museum, and for what a museum should be, is global, they are very aware that they exist within a specific geographic area and it is to that area they must address their efforts. Wilson was shown a number of prospective sites including the Peale Museum and the Walters Art Gallery, and ultimately chose the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) as the most interesting possibility, an "archetypal museum." He was not made to feel welcomed when he entered the lobby of MHS for the first time and says, "I originally felt completely alien in that environment - which intrigued me. I wanted to know why."[96] Having never worked with a permanent collection, with real artifacts as opposed to reproductions, Wilson considered MHS a gold mine. George Ciscle approached Charles Lyle, who responded with guarded enthusiasm, but also with an understanding of the value of the collaboration. Corrin wrote grant proposals to Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts to fund the project. With the former providing the costs for bringing Wilson to Baltimore for an extended residency, and the latter funding the various administrative, programmatic, and material costs for the project, the artist and the two institutions began their partnership.

The two Directors worked out a contract with the MHS Director's only criteria being that the objects Wilson chose had to fit up the stairs and that the artist was not to embarrass MHS, its members, or its constituency. While not the first time MHS had ever

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[96]Donald Garfield, "Making the Museum Mine: An Interview with Fred Wilson," Museum News, May/June, 1993, p. 48-49.

worked with a "living" artist, it was the first time they had participated in a project with a conceptual artist. Wilson was given the "President's Office" as his "studio." From this center of activity, Wilson spent days researching in the archives, talking to the staff and particularly to the registrar. Jennifer Goldsborough, the chief curator of MHS, and Corrin served as co-curators for the project with Goldsborough providing assistance with the collection, while Corrin, whose experience is in contemporary art, worked directly with the artist.

Early instances recalled by the staff of MHS include their eagerness to see what the artist was doing. They would frequently stop by the "studio" and look in, only to find Wilson making notes in his journal or reading a document from the archive. Where was the art, they wondered? Unlike the process to which the MHS staff was accustomed, one which requires extensive pre-exhibition planning, there was no exhibition check list issued by Wilson for the registrar, there was no diagram of the exhibition space for the carpenter, and no list of labels to go to graphics. The education department run by Judy Van Dyke was at a particular disadvantage. She could not begin the lengthy process necessary to train the docents, arrange specific education programs and packages, and had no text with which to begin the formulation of a brochure. This, in fact, remained one of the most difficult aspects of the process and was resolved only by the extension of the exhibition from its intended two months to ten months, which then gave Van Dyke the time she needed to develop an appropriate education program.

But what was going to happen in the exhibition space on the third floor? Where did Wilson come from and what was he going to put into his "exhibition?" What was he reading, and reading, and reading? Why was there no "art" in the "studio" and what was he going to do with the odd assortment of objects he was collecting? Not even Wilson could answer the questions about the exhibition at this point.

> I go in with no script, nothing whatsoever in my head. I try to get to know the community that the museum is in, the institution, the structure of the museum, the people in the museum from the maintenance crew to the executive director. I ask them about the world, the museum, and their jobs, as well as the objects themselves. I look at the relationship between what is on view and what is not on view. I never know where that process will lead me, but it often leads me back to myself, to my own experiences.[97]

Wilson's conceptual process also included looking for his own history in MHS and Mining the Museum is about the location of that history within the museum collection and how Wilson chose to represent it to the public.

Fred Wilson is an African American artist of Caribbean descent who lives in New York City, where he grew up. He went to college at the New York State University at Purchase. While maintaining an active exhibition schedule, Wilson has worked as a free lance educator at several museums including the American Crafts Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and continues to do some work for the Bronx Council for the Arts. His efforts at the Bronx Council include the opening of an exhibition and studio program in an empty school building. His fascination with the exhibition as a political statement found an outlet in Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content, and Context in Art. The exhibition was contained within three spaces designed to replicate an ethnographic museum, a turn of the century salon or "period" museum, and a white cube contemporary museum. Artwork by thirty artists was distributed throughout these spaces with lighting, display furniture, arrangement, and labels consistent with each museum "type." The spaces redefined the artwork. Some work became anonymous by grouping them together according to size or shape and by not labeling the artwork, or some appeared to be highly valued by putting them on pedestals and using dramatic gallery lighting. Wilson says that "the way this exhibition worked changed the way I decided to

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[97]Garfield, p. 49.

make art."[98] He also realized he could not use other artists' work because he was politicizing their work through his representation and the artists were not getting due credit for their own artwork.

Wilson went on to create several "exhibitions" in contemporary galleries and art spaces in New York, including Gracie Mansion, White Columns, and Metro Pictures. Playing on the audience's conditioning to read and believe whatever labels were presented by museums, Wilson created a new context for his objects. Reproduction objects given value through their presentation, were humanized through labels, and given histories. Unlike the Senegalese bust of the man and woman at the entrance of the American Museum of Natural History who are labeled only with the name of the donor, Wilson's skeletons in his Primitivism: High and Low exhibition became "Someone's Mother" or "Someone's Sister."[99] In a response to William Rubin's use of the famous Picasso painting in "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, Wilson's reproduction of Les Demoiselles d'Avignon serves as a mirror into the culture from which Picasso appropriated distinct aesthetics. The viewer can look through the eyes and see a video tape of two Senegalese people. "[H]aving access to the cosmologies and the philosophies of the various cultures around the globe, as artists, historians, and curators, we can no longer be so naive as to just extrapolate...design, and not understand that...other things go with it.[100]

Wilson's attempt to bring an identity - a humanness -to anonymous objects and to make visible the invisible is well represented in an impromptu performance that he did at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He had recently completed a piece at Metro Pictures about institutional racism, using guard uniforms from the major New York

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[98]Unpublished (and unpaginated) speech given by Fred Wilson at the Seattle Art Museum, April, 1992.
[99]Seattle speech
[100]Seattle speech

museums. The Whitney asked Wilson if he would give a talk for the staff and docents. Announcing that he would meet the group upstairs, Wilson changed into a guard uniform and stood by the sign announcing the time of the tour. The group came up to the entrance and milled around waiting for him. Not until he tapped one of the docents on the shoulder did they realize that he was standing there - the invisible African American guard made visible.

The "exhibition" Wilson created for The Contemporary and MHS is, in fact, an artist's "installation." Following a 20+ year history of artists (e.g., Andy Warhol, Marcel Broodthaers, Louise Lawler, and Joseph Kosuth) who have critiqued the museum and the marketplace by creating site-specific work which could not be bought or sold, Wilson's work has come full circle from the first artists who, frustrated with the museum system, created works whose size and/or materials prohibited them from being shown within the white cube.[101] There was a dematerialization of the art object; it was not dependent on any media or discipline; it was pulled off of the walls and put into the environment, within the community. Art was to become less a commodity; the intention being that museums and galleries could not attach a value to it or put it into storage or interpret it. This, of course has not happened. "Installation art" has become as prolific as painting and museums, galleries, and alternative art centers have commissioned, bought, sold, and/or stored it. And, if the installation, or some piece of it, could not be sold, it was documented and the documentation (photograph, video, or drawing) is sold. Installations have been a prominent part of the exhibition program at major museums, including most recently the modernist stronghold of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in most recent international events such as the Carnegie International, Documenta, the Venice

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[101]A term used to describe the modernist exhibition space of a gallery or museum. Supposedly neutral, this space is replete with meaning, not the least of which is the eradication of the past and the control of context. See Brian O'Doherty's Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space, (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

Bienale, Sonsbeek, and the Whitney Biennial. There is even a museum for installation art in Pittsburgh, The Mattress Factory. Installations have been dismantled and shown in other locations and pieces of various works have been recycled into new installations. And, as with all art forms, there is the good, the bad, and the indifferent; all of which have been receiving ever increasing critical consideration.[102]

Predominantly used by artists as a critique of social and political institutions, there are a number of artists who have used installation art to critique museums which are, in fact, highly politicized, social institutions.[103]

> It is no accident that many of [the] practitioners...are women; others, like Wilson are artists of color. At the heart of their projects is a struggle to redefine art history, erasing the demarcations of gender, race, and class. As such, their effort reflects the larger struggle being played out in the society as a whole.[104]

Using museum history and cultural theory to frame his critiques, Wilson has combined museum language, practices, and design to lay bare institutional racism and apathy.[105] He uses the environment of the museum, the wall colors, display and labeling

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[102]There has been an ongoing reflection on the state of installation art in the Sunday New York Times. One article by Michael Kimmelman about the Whitney Biennial (April 25, 1993) and the other by Roberta Smith covering the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (January 3, 1993), are just two examples of a press tiring of the sustained mediocrity of much of the installation art found today.

[103]Critics have coined a term for artwork which critiques museums, "museumist art." Donald Garfield uses the term in his article, "Making the Museum Mine: An Interview with Fred Wilson," in Museum News, May/June, 1993.

[104]Howard Halle, "Mining the Museum," Grand Street, October, 1992, p. 171.

[105]Though Wilson did not study cultural theory in college and does not consciously integrate theory with his artwork, his work is easily deconstructed using Postmodernist theoretical concepts and is itself a representation of this theory put into practice. His early reading included James Clifford's Predicament of Culture and the Center for African Art's ART/artifact catalog, both of which came out about the same time he was beginning work on "Rooms with a View." Wilson was grappling with many of the same ideas expressed in Clifford's book and found that the texts he read expanded his knowledge of history, museums, and anthropology. Though Wilson admits that he seldom reads a book cover to cover, he provided names of books, mostly dealing with cultural anthropology, which greatly aided my research.

techniques, and lighting as his vocabulary, his pallet. Recognizing that the "aestheticizing of...objects...anesthetizes the historic importance of the objects and...covers up the colonial history...keep[ing] the imperial attitudes going within the museum,"[106] Wilson manipulates the viewer's response by creating an environment that says "truth" but, instead, shows those truths and their maintenance to be "errors" and challenges the viewer by suggesting alternative "truths." He looks at the museum from the outside, a member of the marginalized, and knows he must also look from the inside, as an educated man, an artist whose work evolves from his experiences.[107]

Much has been said of the title, Mining the Museum, chosen for Wilson's MHS project. What was he referring to? The word "mine" has many connotations - to "mine" as in to dig in the ground for precious metals or minerals, to "make mine" as in to have ownership of the objects, to "mine" as in to place an explosive charge, to "undermine" as in to weaken or wear away the foundation, "[o]r, perhaps closer to the artist's heart, to enable disenfranchised communities to at last call a part of the museum 'mine.'[108] Mining the Museum does all of these things. By entering the MHS and excavating its collection, Wilson revealed some objects never before exhibited, he unearthed his own history from among the collection. But he also set a charge which is connected to MHS's plans for its future programming. Wilson has undermined the concept of "museum" but he has left a door open - a door very wide door through which the world is watching MHS's next steps.

Upon entering lobby of the Maryland Historical Society, the museum

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[106]Seattle speech
[107]From a conversation the author had with Fred Wilson at the "Crossing Cultures" conference held in Barcelona, Spain, June 14, 1993.
[108]Donald Garfield, p. 47.

visitor[109] finds an open space with galleries to the right and left and a dark, somewhat forbidding reception area straight ahead. After signing in and paying the admission fee, the visitor encounters, to the left of the reception desk, a videotape made by Wilson which serves as his artist's or curator's statement. Seen moving through the shadows of the MHS galleries, Wilson asks "Where am I in here?" as he appears to search within the collection. He speaks of leaving clues in the historical society and prompts visitors to look for their own history.

Stepping off of the elevator onto the third floor, you literally enter Wilson's work as you move forward into the artist's installation. Though you are tempted to, and should, walk through the "trompe l'oeil"[110] exhibition looking at each object and its attendant label, the entire third floor, is an "installation" and represents one totality. And, though there are no knobs to pull or buttons to push, your movement through the installation is interactive.

Directly in front of the elevator stands a large vitrine, its plastic cover protecting a large silver globe. Originally an advertising award, the globe has "TRUTH" printed across the equator. Surrounding the globe are small empty acrylic mounts. Considering that a museum is anything but the presenter of absolute truth, this truth in advertising trophy seems ironic. The empty mounts provide the base upon which to consider alternative or personal truths. "Wilson makes clear that the link between historical veracity and the portrayal of history is as tenuous as the connection between truth and advertising,"[111] a

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[109]The interpretation of this installation is not neutral; it is through the eyes (and filters) of the author, an educated woman whose work in the arts extends through a lifetime of experiences. Having been educated as an artist, art historian, and Americanist, and having worked as an arts administrator for more than a decade, it would be impossible for me to interpret this exhibition in any way other than my experience dictates.
[110]Lisa Corrin, unpublished paper given at an education seminar sponsored by the Getty Museum
[111]Halle, p. 171.

concept (or contradiction) familiar to everyone. The room is a soft grey, a very neutral color and an interesting choice of colors for the presentation of the concept of "truth" within an environment (a museum) long presented as a neutral space but, in fact, absolutely lacking neutrality.

On either side of the vitrine stand six pedestals. Placed to the right of the truth globe, three pedestals hold busts of Henry Clay, Stonewall Jackson, and Napoleon Bonaparte. None of these men are from Maryland but all three were white and all three were considered to be men of prominence. To the left are three empty pedestals. These pedestals represent exclusion; the MHS has no busts of famous African Americans and, as Wilson has mentioned, it is unlikely that formal busts were made during the nineteenth century of any African Americans. In the place of the non-existent bust are small brass plaques identifying three individuals who were Marylanders and who played critical roles in the history of the state - Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Banneker, and Harriet Tubman. The emptiness of the three pedestals echoes the emptiness of the acrylic mounts. Truth now has a name but is still invisible.

This section of the installation may be difficult for the viewer to understand, yet is crucial to comprehending Wilson's objective. If one enters anticipating a cruise through objects and labels, it becomes quickly apparent that these objects and their attendant labels do not necessarily provide answers or identification of the object before the viewer. Because museum goers spend so little time reading labels, and because these labels are not clear contextual referents to the object,[112] it might make it even more difficult for the viewer to comprehend what is happening at first. One looks at the object and is left with questions which are further reinforced (and not answered) by Wilson's labels. The

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[112]John Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, The Museum Experience, (Washington, DC: Whalesback Books, 1992) pp. 70-74.

language of labels serves several functions, not the least of which is to provide a context to the object. Is it a painting? A watercolor? On paper or canvas? Who made it? When? Who owns/donated it? What is it about? Where did it come from? What was it used for? How big is it? Other information includes the registrar's catalog number. Some works are identified only by this number and none of the other questions are answered as directly as the viewer would usually expect.

Wilson has included a set of numbers as well. In the section of the installation specifically about Native American's is a small acrylic case with arrowheads placed edge to edge. They are not identified as such but only as "A Collection of Numbers 76.25.3-76.1.67.11." Harking to the time when museums collected obsessively and indiscriminately in order to classify and catalog all natural and manmade objects, Wilson draws attention to the practice itself. "The message here is that the cataloging process ...- assigning cryptic, sequential numbers to handcrafted objects that were central to the aesthetics of North American native culture - degrades the objects, reduces them to mere property."[113] Could they also represent the anonymous Indian skeletal remains which are also stored as no more than numbers in museums?

Poised like visitors in a gallery staring at photographs which are hanging on the wall, cigar store indians stand with their backs to you while they appear to look into the faces of contemporary Native Americans living in Maryland. Wilson wanted to make a point that these wooden carvings are not Native Americans, nor portraits of Native Americans, but instead the stereotypical portrayal of what the cigar store owner thought an "indian" looked like. The sculptures remain as icons of the commerce of a crop the Native American taught the colonizing Europeans to grow, a crop which assimilated into the

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[113]Simon Dumenco, "Lost and Found: Artist Fred Wilson Pulls Apart Maryland's Hidden Past," The City Paper, May 1, 1992, p.10.

European culture with significantly more ease than its original farmer. In keeping with this transfer of identity to the maker/owner, Wilson has named the "indians" after the cigar store owners themselves - it is their concept of the Native American thus the store owners' identity.

A remnant of a previous exhibition about duck decoys was a floor to ceiling map of the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland, particularly Southern Maryland which was once an important tobacco growing area. Originally used to identify gun clubs and duck hunting areas in the bay area, Wilson appropriated the map for his installation, changed the labels to reflect the names of all the Native American tribes once living on the rich tidal lands. Even the black and white photographs can't help the sense of eradication one feels when looking at this map, knowing that, for the most part, many of these tribes no longer exist and the cigar store indians are what is left to represent (erroneously) once thriving cultures.

"Am I your brother?" "Am I your pet?" "Am I your friend?" "Who combs my hair?" "Who washes my back?" "Who quiets me when I dream?" "Where is my mother?" Spoken in plaintive voices, the children in the paintings speak directly to the viewer. Using motion detectors to trigger the voices and the spots which highlight the slave children in the paintings, Wilson brings the viewer's attention to images used to balance compositions and/or display wealth, figures which are painted in washes or hidden in the shadows. These paintings of prominent Maryland families have been displayed throughout MHS but when moved to the third floor they became documents of the lives of the slave children. Wilson intentionally left clues where the paintings originally hung; a dog collar was placed on the wall in a first floor alcove representing the metal collar encircling the young boy's neck; a muslin headwrap and a bowl were placed elsewhere in the Society are clues to a servitude barely visible before the artist moved the work, manipulated the

light and literally gave voice to the disenfranchised.

One of these paintings, "The Children of Commodore John D. Danels," c. 1826, by Robert Street, was used on the announcement for Mining the Museum. Previewing Wilson's use of light to identify the African American children in several paintings, the exhibition announcement card was die cut to reveal two isolated images of young African American children painted into the shadows. This painting is particularly well known, has travelled to other museums for exhibition and has been used in MHS's new exhibition, Classical Maryland. The author was present at the opening of this exhibit in April, 1993, and witnessed an exchange between two people which, in my mind, exemplified what Mining the Museum was about: The wife of a board member of a prominent Baltimore institution walked up to the painting and exclaimed "Oh, look at this frame!" The husband, walking behind her, turned and admired the frame, then, looking at the painting, the same painting he saw when he attended the closing celebrations for Mining the Museum, said, "Look, five children!" There are seven children in the painting, but in its new venue, without the lights to make them visible, two of those children have again become compositional devices. The African American children have again become invisible.

Museums will seldom exhibit an object which has been damaged and MHS is no exception. However, Wilson convinced them to let him use a Henry Bebe painting with a tear across the face. Enlisting the aid of one of the guards, Wilson recorded a voice and face for the man hidden behind facade. Placing a video monitor behind the painting, the man gained a presence as he spoke of the "secret" he lives with - "No one knows that I am inside you..." says the disquieting voice to all who stand before it. This painting/video engendered one of the very few negative letters which MHS received during the course of the show from a bible school teacher who was shocked that MHS would address issues of "inter-racial sex" and said, had she known that the piece was there, she never would have

brought children to the exhibition.

During the docent training, this particular piece also caused great consternation among the docents who could not understand why it was necessary to speak of such things, after all, they said, all this racism stuff had ended with the civil rights movement. Angered by what they thought was a "callous disregard" on the part of the artist, the docents began to respond very negatively to Corrin, who was taking them through the exhibition in preparation for their own tours. Usually articulate, she was finding it difficult to conceal her frustration and confront their distaste when one of the docents spoke up. The only male docent, and a person who had been a part of the docent group for a number of years, he said he understood why it had been included. He understood because he was black. A very light skinned man, he shocked this group of docents who had known him as their colleague but had not known he was black. His comments to the docents, validating the artist's work through his own experience, resolved what was becoming a very difficult situation and laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding by the docents.

Around the wall and in the display case in the center of the room, were etchings with vellum oversheets. Small holes are cut in the sheets to reveal the presence of African Americans in the scenes. Isolating these images brought attention to their presence in the landscape, as did Wilson's use of lighting and double labeling on some of the works. Of specific interest is a small Ernst Fisher painting entitled "Country Life," circa 1850. Reflecting a picnic scene, the family is at leisure, being served by a young black child. Wilson renamed the painting "Frederick Serving Fruit," thus putting the emphasis on the child and giving his labors recognition and value. Sketchbook watercolors by LaTrobe, depicting African Americans in a variety of activities with titles referring to the day of the week or the activity, such as fishing, were renamed identifying the individuals by name -

names taken from the slave records of the LaTrobe's family's account books. While not historically accurate, and the source of some tisk-tisking by museum historians who could not accept such "shoddy scholarship,"[114] the point was made that in the nearby painting of Mrs. Thomas Everette and Children, (a painting by African American artist Joshua Johnson which Wilson labeled "Ou est mon visage? - Where is my face?) the white family had identities while the slaves remained anonymous.

An effective use of museum display technique was Wilson's application of titles which named specific sections of the "exhibition." Placed on the vitrines or walls, these titles categorized specific groupings. Wilson's use of "Metalwork 1793-1880" is one example. Housed in a vitrine and displayed for the viewer was metal work, in this case a fine set of Baltimore's silver repousse. Lying in the center of this collection was a set of iron slave shackles,[115] also metal work made in Baltimore in this time period.

Under the glass of a round table, a mannequin's hand holds a card imprinted with a likeness of George Washington and the title "One of the Rebels." It further identifies him as "The Southern Gentleman and Slaveholder." There is no doubt that the labor forces at Mount Vernon, Monticello, or Carroll Mansion were slave labor, but the fact that these patriots held people in bondage to do the work they themselves and others like them would not do is not a part of the history revealed at MHS. This simple device brings that truth home through its mere presentation in this setting and is further reinforced by the replica of a slave ship sitting atop 1812 estate inventories of the Carroll family. Bales of hay, oxen, chickens, wagons, tools, Joshua, Easter, Hezick are all listed and valued. An

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[114]From a conversation this author had with a staff member of the Margaret Strong Museum while at a meeting in New York. She really did say "Tisk-Tisk"!

[115]The shackles and the photographs of Native Americans were the only objects which needed to be borrowed from outside MHS.

ox is worth more than an elderly or infirm slave. It is very easy to romanticize the eighteenth and nineteenth century lives of land holders and slaves, we have an entire entertainment industry doing it for us, but one cannot help but consider whether these human beings listed in the same manner as so much cattle or produce were treated any better than the bovine with which they share the pages of the inventory.

A tattered sedan chair was placed on a plinth in front of a painting of black livery men waiting to lift a similar chair to locomote a woman dressed in eighteenth century finery. One is eye to window with the object and can sense the weight of the chair. "Modes of Transportation 1770-1910," however, has much less to do with transportation of people than the transference of ideology. A baby carriage is fitted with linens including a linen Ku Klux Klan hood. And, ahead of the carriage on the wall is a photograph of an African American woman pushing a similar carriage as she takes her charge, a white child, for a walk. Racism is taught by example from a very early childhood and reinforced as one ages. The child that the woman is strolling is the student of racism. And, the woman, the care-taker of the child, will move, as the child ages, to being the object of that child's racism and oppression.

The exhibition layout is in a large circle, moving from room to room and increasing in intensity. The colonial green of the transport room changes to a vivid red in the next section as the viewer comes face to face with a punt gun (also a remnant of the decoy exhibition). Long since deemed illegal for hunting ducks, this huge gun sat on three silk covered pedestals aimed at a wooden toy carved and painted to look like a black man. It was sitting among duck decoys in a covered vitrine, the target of the invisible hunter (racism?). Around the walls were enlarged copies of broadsides used to post awards for runaway slaves. Highlighting words which drew attention to the physical condition of the slaves (hobbled, limping, scarred), these broadsides culminated in a pair

of text panels which were entitled "Tracking" and "Tolling." With wording which bore striking similarity, the two texts described the process for tolling for ducks and tracking slaves, "decoying" both by various methods. After reading the texts, the viewer turned around and found him/herself looking through the vitrine past the decoys and the toy and down the barrel of the punt gun.

In a case covered with the same red silk, beside a small broadside describing the runaway slave, Easter, sat an iron bootjack. A bootjack was used to pull off muddied boots before entering the house. The process was simple; you stood on the narrow end of the instrument with one foot and inserted the heel of your boot between the splayed lower portion and you pulled. This particular bootjack was a cast iron image of a black woman lying on her back, her arms reaching up and holding the back of her head while her legs are lifted and open to receive the heel of her master. The piece is infuriating, degrading, and horrifying. Placing it next to the handbill tends to personalize the object thus reinforcing the strong emotional response to its blatant sexism and racism.

Turning around from this case one encounters "Cabinetmaking 1820-1960." The central object in the setting is crucifix-like. Sitting in front, arranged in a position for viewing the cross, were period chairs. The object, identified by a small tag at its base, was a whipping post, crudely built and the color of tar. Its surface is sleek, as if it had been smoothed by the warmth and oil from many bodies. It was used until 1938 and stood in front of the Baltimore City Jail until it was given to MHS in 1960. Built at the same time as the chairs but never exhibited, this object has holes in the cross bar to tie ropes around the wrists of the person being whipped. The whole structure leans a little forward speaking to the weight of repeated use. Combined with the gun and the bootjack, this whipping post creates a riveting and violent entrance into the final red room.

As soon as the viewer entered the small room behind the whipping post, a motion detector triggered a projector from which names - Jim Isaac, Old Butchell, Isham, Harriet Tubman, Jeremiah Fox, Lucy, Bury Newsome, Enoch Reed, among others - began to shoot on the walls like flashes from a gun. A large doll house was opened and the rooms were all in disarray with the "dead" dolls lying on the floors of the rooms. In one of the lower rooms sat a huge "Uncle Remus-like" doll with wizened features and wild grey hair. This doll sat as if resting after his rampage. Or was the doll, absurd in its size, a response to the way the rumors and actual uprisings were blown out of proportion by whites who, knowing they were responsible for the institution of slavery, were preparing for their just due, their Armageddon? In a case in front of the doll house is a diary of a woman describing her fear as a child of eight of "her" slaves rising up against her as in the Nat Turner revolt.

> The spirit of revolt spread throughout the Eastern Shore and we in a County without police protection we were at the mercy of the slaves. The demon of massacre was at our door and the dread of terrible torture was maddening.[116]

Above the case was a painting of a burning house. On the opposite wall was a painting of Harpers Ferry and several pointed stakes, supposedly used in the raid, were pinned to the walls. The sound of the projector slapping slides in front of the lens and the splashing, white light of the names work on the senses of the viewer which are already raw from the previous room.

With the intensity built to such a level, the cool, royal blue rooms which follow are both a relief and a shock. But, as has been Wilson's posture throughout the exhibit, he presents more questions rather than answering those the viewer has been considering. Vitrines holding objects which were made by slaves, an earthen jug, a basket, a chair, and

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[116]Autobiography of Mrs Enoch Louis Lowe, transcribed in 1925, collection of Maryland Historical Society.

those brought back from the "Maryland in Liberia" colony, were lighted as one would find them if they were made by whites and displayed elsewhere in MHS. The viewer is returned, momentarily, to thinking about individual achievement as opposed to institutional oppression. Wilson had intended to have the sound of African or African American music in this room but the vitrine muffled the sound -maybe that was appropriate. Several MHS staff have mentioned this room as a disappointment. Not fully understanding what Wilson was trying to do or being at such an emotional pitch before entering it, they felt somehow let down. The MHS Director, Charles Lyle, on the other hand, found this room to be one of the best in the installation. He sees, as he moved through to the Benjamin Banneker section, a resurgence of hope and future. Wilson also feels very strongly about this room and the value of the handcrafted objects and Banneker's journals. He views the journals as being the most valuable African American objects in MHS.[117] As you moved past the Liberian objects into the Banneker Room, the blue walls, controlled by lighting became darker, richer, more somber and very much in keeping with the study of the stars. The Banneker's astronomical charts dissolved one into the other on one of the walls behind a library table. Opened on the table were Banneker's journals which included his diaries, mathematics equations and astronomical charts. A computer monitor displayed a chart of the stars as they would have appeared on October 18, 1800, which coincided with the same date and configuration illustrated in Banneker's journal. Affixed to the walls were text panels which featured excerpts from Banneker's diaries. His dreams, highly personal and sometimes violent reflections of his fear and loathing of slavery, were printed on panels which were affixed to the walls; they reveal an intelligent man coping with the institution of racism. In writing to Thomas Jefferson, Banneker expressed his pride in his race and his concern that his work be preserved and used to stop slavery, that the intelligence of his people be recognized. "Mining the Museum thus ends by echoing its beginning, but adds a note of grace. After relentless exposure to a complex, institutionally codified

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[117]Seattle speech

oppression, Wilson ends with the affirming portrayal of a courageous individual."[118]

The printed materials - fliers, curators' statements, question and answer sheets, and audience response forms - were added during the eleven months of the exhibition. The first piece to be included was present when the exhibition opened and was to be found on the ride in the elevator where acrylic holders labeled "Art," "History," and "Museum" were installed. This handout[119] asks questions including "What is it?," "For whom does its exist?" "What do you see?" and "Where are you?" All of the holders contain the same questions prompting you to consider the relationship between art, history and museums. This didactic material was generated by the curators. Wilson did have some problem with it being included and justly so as it appears to be his work, a continuation of the reception area video. Though later copies of this material indicated that they were prepared by the curators, Simon Dumenco, whose City Paper article was for the most part overwhelmingly positive, based the following comment on the assumption that the elevator texts were part of the artist's work

> ...the exhibition is marred sporadically, by a sort of clumsy didacticism, most glaringly in the elevator...[by] take-along fliers...[which] come off as being altogether condescending, and - given the frame of mind Wilson puts us in [with the video] -superfluous.[120]

The question and answer sheets entitled, "Do you have questions about Mining the Museum?" provide some background information about Wilson and explain what installation art is. In addition, questions were asked about each room and the answers given were to assist the visitor in understanding the exhibition. It was intended that these forms would be picked up at the end of the visit, however, this was not often the case. As if in need of prompting, or because of habit, many visitors looked for handouts as soon as

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[118]Halle, p. 172.
[119]See Appendix A for Elevator Form
[120]Dumenco, p. 10.

they got off of the elevator. While these questions were helpful to the overall understanding of the exhibition, they also could predetermine the visitors' responses to specific segments of the installation. It is difficult to find the line that demarcates when the viewer is being prompted and when they are being given necessary information. A clear example of crossing that line is the answer given to the question "What is the 'Naughty Nellie' bootjack?" which seems to go too far.

> A bootjack was a tool used to remove one's boots. The image of an African-American woman lying on her back used for such a purpose symbolizes much of the violence and degradation to which enslaved women were routinely subjected.[121]

Had the writer stopped with the first sentence, or maybe embellished it by describing the process one used for removing boots, the answer would have allowed the visitor to determine how they felt about the object, its use, and its symbolism. But the second sentence makes the connection between the object and what the viewer should be feeling about the bootjack without giving the viewer the opportunity to freely interpret his or her own emotional response.

The curators' statements were placed between the two elevator doors along with information about The Contemporary. Because the exhibition took place in the galleries of the MHS, it was necessary for The Contemporary to maintain some presence during the run of the exhibition and the handouts provided that visibility when the staff of The Contemporary were not able to be present. The curators' statements in the adjacent holder were very different from one another. Corrin, whose area of expertise is contemporary art, spoke of the history of the art form, the process of the exhibition, and the questions asked by the artist and the artwork, even adding more of her own. She talks of Wilson

> ...crank[ing] up his emotional pitch, generating disturbing paradoxes and subtle but chilling ironies between texts, objects, and spaces. Blurring museum categories such as style/period, high/low art, art/artifact,

[121]See Appendix B for Question and Answer Form.

> self/other, Wilson's installations undermine our assumptions and expectations of museums, art and history.[122]

Goldsborough, on the other hand, wrote a much more personal, esoteric statement. She too focused on questioning even beginning her essay with "Questions. Questions are more important than answers." She states

> People of the past are 'other' than I, just as people of other races, other genders, other ages, other experiences....The reality of the present or of the past is in my own comprehension. The study of history is only a closer and closer approximation to past reality, just as understanding another person is an exercise in accepting their essential different-ness. I understand by asking questions.[123]

A later addition to the printed material made available to the visitors was the audience response form[124] which was placed at the end of the exhibition. The eight questions asked the visitor to talk about how they felt about Mining the Museum and museums in general, how they came to know of the exhibition, and who they are? The form could be completed there, pinned on the wall or turned in at the front desk, or it could be taken home and mailed in later. Very few of the forms were mailed; most were turned in at the front desk. A random sampling of 260 response forms (55 by African American, Hispanic, Native American or Asian visitors, 151 by white visitors, and 54 not specified) found only a very few critical response such as remarks about the handouts, not understanding some aspect of the installation, wondering why MHS did not show the objects before, etc.. One viewer, the only dissension, stated, "While I understood the comparisons and relationships that the curator was trying to show, I thought the exhibition was contrived and tedious." The positive remarks ranged from a simple large "Fascinating!" written at the top of the form to thoughtful and thought -provoking responses. The first question "Which part of Mining the Museum did you find the most

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[122]See Appendix C for Curators' Statements
[123]Ibid.
[124]See Appendix D for Audience Response Form.

powerful? Least? Why?" garnered responses such as

> Most powerful was the Green Rm #1 [the room with the "speaking" portraits]. Since I accompanied a group of students from Baltimore City, it is my feeling that they ask themselves these questions frequently. African American teacher

> The most powerful images were of the whipping post, accompanied by arranged chairs, and the runaway slave postings. The quality of the whipping post shows how it was definitely made to last. The arranged chairs shows/symbolizes the arrogance and beastiality [sic] of how whippings induced public spectacle. African American college student

> KKK hood in the baby carriage. Why - because it succinctly demonstrated how effortlessly we are able to pass feeling, opinions, and traits onto our children whether they are compassionate or not. White museum professional

> Silver service and shackles and KKK hood in stroller - it had a chilling, slap-in-the-face attitude - very disquieting White "freelancer"

While this same "freelancer" from New York City apologized for not "getting" the "Dreams/Astrological sequence," a "Storyteller," also from New York City, felt most strongly about the Benjamin Banneker journal because it made him "finally...a real person to me instead of a name."

Many of the respondents wanted to know if the exhibition would travel, which also seemed to be a consistent question during the AAM conference. But Wilson's installation was very specific to Maryland and to the Maryland Historical Society. He could have chosen to do a narrative history of African Americans in Maryland or an exhibition which displayed artifacts created by African Americans in the same manner as MHS's current exhibit, Classical Maryland. He chose, however, to bring forward a history unseen or barely seen at MHS, yet housed in the archives and storage rooms of the Society's buildings. As much a critique of museums in general, this exhibition was specifically a critique of the Maryland Historical Society. It took great courage for Charles Lyle to agree to do this project. But, truthfully, MHS had the least to lose. If it failed, they would have seemed to be game participants in another project by the "upstart museum

with moxy,"[125] The Contemporary. It didn't fail, though; and its success was due partly because of timing.

Over 2,000 AAM conference attendees visited Mining the Museum during the five days of sessions in late April, three weeks after the exhibition opened to the public. The theme of the conference, entitled "Vision and Reality," paired the idealism of the profession's "sense of mission" with the reality of resources.[126] A full third of the 100+ sessions dealt with issues of diversity - how to attract diverse audiences, what happens when an exhibition causes controversy in the community, multicultural museum education, moving beyond rhetoric. But, of those which discussed exhibitions, most were contrite defenses of failed efforts. The majority of the diversity sessions dealt with the "who," "how," and even the "why," of developing culturally diverse audiences.

Though some visitors had seen Mining the Museum on Saturday, the installation was introduced to the conference attendees on Sunday evening, April 26, 1993, at a Mount Vernon Square open house shared by The Maryland Historical Society and The Walters Art Gallery. MHS reached capacity as word of mouth travelled and the trip to the third floor became a "must" for everyone entering the building. An indication of how fast the reputation of Mining the Museum was gaining momentum was evident when, after MHS closed, Fred Wilson, Lisa Corrin, and George Ciscle entered the Walters for dinner. Standing at the top of the marble stairs, greeting his dinner guests, Robert Bergman, Director of the Walters, made a sweeping gesture with his arm and beckoned to Fred to "Come on in and move around anything that you want; make yourself at home."

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[125]The Contemporary Annual Report, 1993. Quote from an article by Ed Guntz, The Sun, May, 1990, about the use of the Greyhound Terminal building as exhibit space.
[126]1992 American Association of Museums conference program, Vision and Reality

Several times during the conference, individual speakers mentioned Mining the Museum and suggested the audience go to see it. The installation became the talk of the conference and the network of professionals further spread the word bringing visitors to Baltimore from all around the country for the remainder of the time the exhibition was open. In fact, the demand was so great, MHS canceled its winter programs and extended Mining the Museum for nine more months. The doors were flung open, and MHS exceeded all attendance records, estimating over 55,000 people saw Mining the Museum. But, the question is, will The Maryland Historical Society locate the mines left by Wilson and render them harmless before they detonate? Has the process taught MHS how to resolve some of its dilemmas and, will they, through investment in a "minesweep," meet any of the expectations the public has of them and they have of themselves?

Chapter IV

THE AFTERMATH

Both The Contemporary and Fred Wilson have been greatly affected by the experience and success of Mining the Museum, but, while acknowledging their experiences, it is The Maryland Historical Society which this concluding section will especially consider. The Historical Society is an archetypal institution firmly grounded in the established canon, a product of its historical traditions, maintaining elitist, exclusionary practices. It could be described as an ethnographic museum for the material culture of the elite. Mining the Museum has ended and, like so many other exhibition sites after a show ends, the artifacts and artwork have been returned to storage. The rooms have been reconfigured, the old walls have been removed and new ones built. They have been repainted in accordance with the curator's new project. The docents have been acquainted with the new objects and tours have been planned. MHS has opened Classical Maryland, an exhibition which is probably about as far away from Mining the Museum as one could get. But, where is the institution headed and will Mining the Museum have any lasting impact?

The Contemporary has moved on to its next project, Catfish Dreamin', enjoying the light that shone on them for a while but recognizing that Mining the Museum was part of a process. The media coverage of Mining the Museum moved them into the national arena which has benefitted them greatly but, with its small staff, has also seriously increased the work. Their vision, however, remains intact and they have learned from the experience. The field now recognizes that they are not an alternative space but a museum developing a model with applicability to all forms of museums. They are raising the stakes while recognizing that their future is not without challenge. Their mission calls for them to "remain fresh" but how they do that, how they evolve with, and in spite of, their model and evaluate themselves is critical.

The Contemporary and Fred Wilson have entered into an arrangement with The New Press (a non-profit publishing house) to publish a book about the process and the exhibition. Funded in part through a generous grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation, this will be the first major catalog for both The Contemporary and Wilson and they are hoping it is as unique as the process they underwent together. The book should be available in Winter, 1994. While the Historical Society chose not to participate in the project, they too will benefit from the added publicity generated by the marketing and distribution of the book.

Wilson's career has taken off. He has been doing projects around the globe. In this past year, he has been in Poland, Germany, Egypt, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and Seattle and he has upcoming projects scheduled in, among other cities, Los Angeles and Washington, DC (with the Smithsonian). His career was already in motion when he began with Mining the Museum, but the process spawned an immediate call from the field for the creation of "mini-Minings." The caution flag is waving furiously for this artist. Like so many artists before him he must be wary of self-imitation. Like the artform he employs, Wilson has found himself no longer on the outside critiquing the museum but as a part of the apparatus he has been deconstructing.

The same critic who selected Mining the Museum as one of the best exhibitions of 1992, Michael Kimmelman,[127] scathingly reviewed the Whitney Biennial and Wilson was not spared.

> Why yet another crushing pedantic Fred Wilson installation, for example, this one including reproductions of Egyptian art in mock-museum displays, all in order to rehash simplistic points like 'art museums are built on the plunder of the rich and powerful'?...There's nothing new about the debates

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[127]Michael Kimmelman, "The Improbable Marriage of Artist and Museum," New York Times, 2 August 1992, p. H-1.

over sexual and racial representation in museum collections.[128]

One has to question whether this is simply the New York media tiring of its current "new" art and preparing to move onto the next "star of the year." This author believes Wilson's work is far from complete; museums still do not fairly represent women, people of color, or the working class. With the exception of education programs for school children and the occasional "African American Family Day," marginalized populations do not yet have equal access to institutions such as the Maryland Historical Society. If he is to remain effective, if he is to be more than "a knight in shining multicultural armor saving neglected and distorted cultural damsels from Eurocentric dragons,"[129] Wilson should choose his projects carefully, possibly reconsidering the speed of his current trajectory.

But what about the Maryland Historical Society. They have nearly a year's worth of audience evaluation forms. How, or will, they use them? They have "pre-Mining" commitments to do several exhibitions over the next few years but certainly space exists in the schedule for exploring other options. MHS has been seeking funds for a permanent "Mining." It is speculative, however, supported by the Director[130] and the Education

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[128]Michael Kimmelman, "At the Whitney, Sound, Fury and Little Else," The New York Times, April 25, 1993, p. H-37.

[129]Garfield, p. 49.

[130]During the writing of this paper, Charles Lyle resigned his position as Director of MHS to pursue other professional interests. It was Lyle who had the courage to open up his institution to Wilson and The Contemporary. The Director of Education seems to this author to be the only person who truly understands why the past presentation of Mining the Museum is intrinsically linked to the future of MHS. It is conceivable that without a leader with sound administrative skills, a clear knowledge of contemporary museological theories and practices, the ability to develop and educate the board, and imagination and grit (a pragmatic risk-taker!), Maryland Historical Society will revert to its past myopia. It will expand its building behind its iron fence, locked gates, tinted windows, and brick-walled parking lot, oblivious to the community in which it rests and the constituency whose history MHS purports to represent.

Department but not necessarily by the rest of the staff. What they are going to do with their staff, membership, exhibition schedule, board, docents, collection, and policies will depend on how they view this process they have just completed and how willing they are to enter into another one, a process of serious self-examination. This does not mean another Mining the Museum, nor another collaboration with another institution, or another artist curating an exhibition from their collection.

To see in what ways they can go forward, MHS must first look back. In 1994, the institution will be 150 year old. Its history looks very much like its present. Certainly, there have been decided changes not the least of which are the buildings and the increased staff. The Society is facing many of the same problems other museums are coping with: Increased upkeep on an aging building; need for more changing exhibition space; need for expanded and better equipped storage and office space; need for more staff, a more diversified staff, and more competitive salaries; a reduction in public funding and a tightening of private funds; and the renovation, conservation and staffing absolutely necessary to maintain their impressive library and archives. The resolution to this set of problems is simple - money.

But the institution's policies and practices, grounded in a long history of exclusion, should not be predicated on money. They may be impacted by money, but they should not find their inspiration, their philosophical basis in the dollar. The funds available through local and national sources for well planned, carefully implemented community programming, especially educational programming, could greatly impact MHS's current budget.[131] If, as John Dorsey stated in the Baltimore Sun, "[Mining the

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[131]Though I would like to address some resolutions to MHS's financial problems, conflict of interest prohibits me from discussing my knowledge of MHS's financial situation and its ability to get grants. This author works for the Maryland State Arts Council, the state funding agencies for the arts, and one of MHS's funders.

Museum] is personal, powerful, and is redefining how history museums exhibit history and how visitors confront these historical 'truths,'"[132] MHS, the host of this extraordinary exhibition cannot do any less then redefine itself and confront its own epistemological issues.

To consider any type of redefinition, MHS should first recognize that it currently sits squarely within the definition of a museum as "a decontextualized, sanitized, compartmentalized, static, and arranged version of culture, largely representative of the way the world is seen by white, able, heterosexual males."[133] It functions solely within the established canon, reinforcing the role of the dominant culture to control knowledge and thus control power. Its policies are founded within this paradigm and its practices are reflections of this position. MHS must accept that to demonstrate a "cross-cultural empathy, [it must accept] that nothing that is morally wrong can ever be institutionally or politically correct."[134]

Does this mean that MHS needs to change its method of communicating knowledge? Probably. Does it mean it needs to change what knowledge (truths) it communicates? Absolutely. Where does it have to start to make the changes necessary? At the top. MHS has over 60 board members and trustees. This does not count its 17 member Council. Of the 60+ active and inactive board members and trustees, 55 or more are men and all are white. For the most part, the members are all wealthy and many are descendants of old Maryland families. MHS has never had an African American board member; it has just barely opened its ranks to women and not at all to ethnic minorities or

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132 The Maryland Historical Society, 1991-1992: A Newsworthy Year, MHS Annual Report

133 David Chapin and Stephan Klein, "The Epistemic Museum," Museum News, July/August, 1992, p. 60.

134 Robert Sullivan, "Lessons for the Ruling Class," Museum News, May June, 1993, p. 55.

the working class. If the board is to establish a policy of greater inclusion, it should first reconsider its nominating policies. Diversity must become a board priority. Just as the board would not enter a capital campaign (which they are considering) without a long range plan, without clear goals and measurable objectives used to evaluate its progress, nor should it confront its philosophical base without careful planning.

In addition, the board must take an active interest in the programs coming out of the Society, the exhibitions being brought in and the effort being made within to re-establish a connection with the collection in a way that permits reinterpretation. Making excuses for the exhibition plans already on the books will last as long as it takes to add just one more to that list. One idea being discussed for 1994 would ask "What is History?" and would bring together community members with MHS staff to create an exhibition made up of objects which have relevance to personal histories. What is collected and why, what determines value, and who makes the decisions are all questions this exhibit would ask. With the sheer number of objects being produced in today's world, the question of selectivity becomes even more paramount to collecting institutions. Whose history does MHS collect? In this case, the viewers would vote during the course of the project and objects would be accessioned based on the vote. Though still in rough form, the idea has merit as a beginning; revisioning history is the beginning of redefining MHS. But is this just a simple gimmick, a way to avoid making hard choices about difficult issues? What will happen if the viewers choose an object that is not similar to the other objects displayed at MHS? Will the new pieces simply be stored with the whipping post or the bootjack to be "mined" at some future date by the next Fred Wilson? What will happen if the visitors are predominantly current MHS members? What kind of efforts will be made to have cross-cultural representation? How will the boundaries of class, gender, race, and age be crossed?

Taking advantage of the goodwill developed with the community through Mining

the Museum should not be lost. At the opening of Classical Maryland, the only non-white faces belonged to MHS support staff. What does this say about how the exhibition was curated? About who was invited to the opening? What happened to those names from Mining the Museum mailings? Or, does the exhibition speak only to the elite? What kind of curatorial decisions could have been made to change that? How could the label text expand who the exhibition speaks to? What did MHS learn in the year and a half of being "mined"? Was Mining the Museum just an example of institutional noblesse oblige?

A diverse ad hoc committee made up of art and history professionals, community leaders, and educators from outside of MHS (individuals who speak for economically broad and culturally diverse communities, those who have a stake in what happens at MHS, within museums in general, and within their communities in particular, those who are risk takers coupled with those who are more pragmatic) in combination with board members, volunteers, and staff from MHS could greatly inform the future of MHS. As MHS is currently working to develop a long range plan for the institution, this committee could evaluate the policies and practices of MHS. The recommendations could become an integral part of the planning process and, followed by the development of a sound fiscal plan, the implementation of the recommendations could become a reality. But this would only be a futile exercise if the board is not prepared to hear some unpleasant truths and to be willing to let go of some of its power.

The National Endowment for the Humanities grant just received by the Education Department to expand MHS's educational program is a shot in the arm for an ailing budget, a budget devastated by state cutbacks. But, it is treating a symptom. It is limited to the bounds of a grant conceptualized nearly five years and while its use is valid, the environment at MHS demands much more. The Education Department deserves greater credibility within MHS. They have made important inroads into diversifying and

expanding the community that supports MHS, and if MHS is to have audiences, members, patrons, etc. in the next century, the Education Department must continue to do an effective job. As museums begin to "educate towards an entirely different set of values,"[135] it is the coordination between those who preserve, research, display, interpret and educate that will make the process successful.

The docent program at MHS is very similar to those at most museums of the same type. It is made up of close and distant relatives of Maryland's founding families, individuals with interest in the specific objects currently on display at MHS, and/or those who have a fascination or professional interest in history and historical artifacts. During Mining the Museum, artist/docents were added to the ranks of the MHS docents and provided regularly scheduled discussions about the installation as a contemporary art form. This is just one idea for expanding the ranks of the volunteers. A youth docent program, docents who discuss the collection from completely different ethnic, cultural or economic backgrounds, docents who are anthropologists, sociologists, cabinetmakers, or guards are just some examples of how the program could be expanded.

How does the MHS board challenge its staff to confront a major epistemological change? They must start with themselves. One of the most difficult aspects of change is not alienating traditional constituency, particularly your supporters, by appearing to be too "politically correct" or too superficial by addressing issues of diversity solely for the purpose of increasing constituency and funding. Members must accept that Aunt Bessy's clock may not be on display, nor will Dad's collection of guns, or Cousin Eldridge's sterling tea set. Or that the things said about these objects may relate to a more inclusive historical interpretation. Maybe Aunt Bessy's clock may not be discussed as a fine example of Hepplewhite cabinetry but instead as the timepiece used to determine the hours

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135 Chapman and Klein, p. 76.

it took for a running slave to reach the safe house for transfer to the underground railway. Maybe some labels need to be didactic while others need to do nothing but ask questions. Maybe the objects will be replaced by items drawn from the collection which have an appeal to the broader community.

Is the Maryland Historical Society to continue to be representative of only the dominant class or does it hope to represent the history of all Maryland? If the Korean population has a long and active history in Maryland, should that history not be represented *with* the history of the dominant class? Must it be excluded or subjugated or exoticized? Should the Korean, or Native American, or African American populations build their own museum with their own set of restrictions; who will they leave out? And, if they do that, who will fund it?

Partnerships are critical to survival in a shrinking economy but they are also important to audience building, board development, exhibition planning, etc.. The Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis is a suggested partner for MHS. Housing a collection of African and African American art and artifacts, BDM staff, working with curators from MHS could study their respective collections and learn from each other. They could address their staff shortages by sharing staff or they could plan joint exhibitions addressing ideas of mutual interest and share the cost of research and development by showing the exhibit first in Annapolis, then in Baltimore. The Commission on African American Affairs, which oversees the BDM, would be a source of board prospects for MHS and visa versa.

The Historical Society should look to creating a museum studies program within a local city high school. They could unite core curriculum courses like history, science, and literature, and electives like art and business with a program which trains students in

different aspects of museum research and operation. They could train high school students in museum education and have them design programs for their peers.

If MHS if going to eliminate the perception held within the community of its being an elitist museum presenting its own version of historical truth and pretending that the rest of history either didn't happen, doesn't matter, or is being handled by other institutions, it should seek a new way to frame and interpret knowledge. It should embrace diversity as true difference. It should look to its board for support, leadership and guidance, and shape that board to reflect the diversity of the state it represents. It should critically and creatively use its collection to reach a broader constituency. It should look at the practices of the exhibition committee and it must expand its curatorial staff to include more culturally diverse, professional staff members who are invested in the inclusion of all of Maryland's populations within the collection, exhibitions, and programs. It should strengthen its education department, including it in all of its program decision-making meetings. It should increase its funding base with grants which support multicultural program development and implementation. It should develop partnerships both within the institution and within the community. It should reapportion funds to accomplish the new goals determined by an inclusive long range plan. New values, new practices should support new ways of knowing and the redistribution of power.

Mining the Museum was identified as being one of the most significant exhibitions of the year by the Baltimore Sun, Washington Post and the New York Times, and is the recipient of the American Association of Museums' award for the 1992 Exhibition of the Year. It made history visible and palpable at The Maryland Historical Society. It broke through to the system which has supported the production of this history, this truth, and now it is up to MHS to respond to these dynamics by identifying a new process which will challenge its political, economic and institutional status quo. If The Maryland Histor-

ical Society chooses to maintain that status quo, in spite of its highly visible and critical experience with Mining the Museum, the Society will find itself ghettoized within its own dominance and the public support it needs to continue into the next century will not be there.

APPENDIX A: Elevator Form

The following text appeared on handouts placed in acrylic mounts (labeled "Art," "History," and "Museum") located in the elevators:

What is it?

Where is it? Why?

What is it saying?

How is it used?

For whom was it created?

For whom does it exist?

Who is represented?

How are they represented?

Who is doing the telling? The hearing?

What do you see?

What do you see?

What can you touch?

What do you feel?

What do you think?

Where are you?

APPENDIX B: Question and Answer Sheet

The following text appeared on handouts made available to each visitor:

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT **MINING THE MUSEUM?**

Who is Fred Wilson?

Fred Wilson is an installation artist of African-American and Carib descent. Educated at the State University of New York at Purchase, Wilson has been involved with art and arts organizations at many levels - as a museum educator, a gallery director for the Bronx Council of the Arts, a board member of the National Association of Artists Organizations and, of course, as a practicing artist. "Museums," he says, "are where we who are engaged in alternative visions go to get our 'inspiration,' where we get hot under the collar and decide to do something about it." The Contemporary and The Maryland Historical Society, in a unique collaboration, invited Fred Wilson to use objects from the Historical Society's collection to create a work of installation art which invites the viewer to see these objects in new - and sometimes disturbing - ways.

What is installations art?

An installation artist uses a full range of creative media from painting, sculpture, and photography to video, architectural design and even objects from everyday life. An artist uses such media to create an environment which surrounds us and usually invites our participation. **Mining the Museum** is a work of installation art, created by a single artist. Everything that you see (and hear), even the colors of the walls, is the result of Wilson's reflections and choices. Instead of paints and canvas the artist has used artworks and artifacts from the permanent collection of The Maryland Historical Society, selecting and placing them to create a work of art. The moment you step off the elevator you are, in a very real sense, entering the mind of the artist.

How did the artist get his ideas?

The first question Fred Wilson asks when he goes into a museum is, "Where am I here?" Part Carib, part African-American, he searched the museum collection for his personal history. He created the installation with this question as its foundation.

How do I know if I have interpreted the meaning correctly?

Mining the Museum is structured upon questions and associations rather the "answers" and "truths." There are no right answers to the questions that the artist poses. The following notes may help you answer some of your own questions about **Mining the Museum.**

GRAY ROOM #1

Why is the "truth trophy" surrounded by empty mounts?

People often come to historical museums looking for the "truth" about history. Putting the Advertising Clubs' "truth trophy" on display and surrounding it with empty plastic mounts, the artist is ironically questioning this attitude. After all, doesn't everyone interpret history in his own individual way? By asking us to notice a part of museum exhibits we usually ignore, the artist may be preparing us to focus on unexpected parts of pictures later in the exhibit.

Why are the Indians placed with their backs to us?

In the past, cigar store owners commissioned carvers to make statues of Indians to place in front of their stores. However, like classic Hollywood Westerns, these images were founded upon legend and had little to do with actual Native American culture. The artist is suggesting that the statues may tell you more about what the cigar store owners thought about Native Americans than about real Native Americans. By turning the figures toward photographs of 20th century Native Americans, Wilson questions this stereotypical representation.

*Have you seen the 19th c. paintings of Native Americans on the first floor of MHS?

GREEN ROOM #1

Who are the children speaking in the paintings?

The African-Americans used in the paintings as status symbols and compositional devices were real people about whose lives little, if anything, is known today. The actual voices you hear are those of school children in Baltimore.

What is the voice in the video behind the torn painting saying?

"Nobody knows that I am inside you, except Mama. She lives far away. I promise I won't expose myself to your wife. And if you move, your children will never know. But you will have to live with me constantly reminding you of what you've been missing and what you did until the day you die."

Many Americans today are of mixed ancestry. Society, however, generally views people with even small amounts of African ancestry as African-Americans. On one level, this piece tells the story of a man who "passes for white" despite his African ancestry and lives with the secret inside. The words invite us to ponder the unseen inner lives which all of us hide from the world.

Where did the damaged painting come from?

Museums do not usually exhibit damaged artworks. This painting by the noted Baltimore painter Henry Bebie of an unknown man is one such object. The artist requested use of a damaged painting specifically for his installation.

What does the artist's label for the Joshua Johnson painting mean?

Joshua Johnson, who lived in Baltimore, was this nation's first professional African-American artist. It is thought he came to this country from the French West Indies. For this reason, the label says, in French, "Ou est *mon* visage?", meaning "Where is *my* face?" This is the central question that the artist is posing throughout the installation and which has special meaning here because there is no known portrait of the artist Joshua Johnson.

GREEN ROOMS #2

Why are there slave shackles in the same case as the fine silver?

Through this shocking juxtaposition, the artist suggests that we should not try to separate history into "beautiful" history or "ugly" history. The formal, "museum-like" lettering that the artist uses to label the case "Metalwork" is a common museum devise for doing just that -isolating one item of production or event in history while failing to recognize the larger picture.

*To find out more about slavery visit the Discover Maryland gallery on the first floor.

Why is there a Ku Klux Klan hood in the baby carriage?

This is a complex and powerful image that speaks to use on many levels. In addition to the emotional impact of finding the Klan hood where one least expects it, we face the difficult issue of black nannies and servants raising children who would, in many cases, become their oppressors. It also suggests that attitudes, including prejudicial stereotypes, begin in childhood.

What is happening in the doll house?

The doll house juxtaposes the power of the white master upstairs with the spiritual powers of the African American conjurer below. Like children with their toys, the artist used the house as a setting for dramatic fantasy.

RED ROOM #1

What is a "punt gun?"

Punt guns were used on the Chesapeake Bay for hunting and were capable of killing many ducks at one time. (They were outlawed in 1918.) The punt gun, as well as the decoys and the map of the Chesapeake, were used in the exhibition that preceded **Mining the Museum** about the history of duck hunting. Walking through the show, the artist saw in the hunting of the ducks a powerful metaphor for the hunting down of runaway slave. Note the similarity between the text panels on duck hunting and capturing runaway slaves and the use of the word "decoyed" to describe how runaways were

trapped.

*Have you visited the Maritime Museum on the lower level?

What is the "Naughty Nellie" bootjack?

A bootjack is a tool used to remove one's boots. The image of an African-American woman lying on her back to be use for such a purpose symbolizes much of the violence and degradation to which enslaved women were routinely subjected.

Why are the chairs placed as they are, around the whipping post?

The whipping post represents a part of history we are not comfortable looking at. The artist plays with our impulse to avert our gaze from it menacing presence by displaying the post as a dark figure on a stage before an audience of Victorian chairs. The different furniture styles suggests various segments of society - the church-like look of Gothic revival, the clasped hands decoration suggesting fraternal organizations, etc. This arrangement also reminds us of the long tradition of legal punishment as a public spectacle. The whipping post, from the Baltimore City Jail, was last used to punish a wife beater in 1938. It was given to the Historical Society in 1963, ten years after the repeal of the flogging law.

RED ROOM #2

Who are the people whose names are projected on the wall?

The struggle against slavery was a never-ending one. There were full-scale rebellions, such as Nat Turner's (in Virginia in 1831) and John Brown's (at Harpers Ferry in 1859), but also countless smaller acts, ranging from "accidental" fires to early versions of sadden strikes. The diary in the case speaks of the terror that gripped the white population of the South: "The spirit of the revolt spread throughout the Eastern Shore and in a County without police protection we were at the mercy of the slaves. The demon of massacre was at our door." All of the people whose names flash across the walls (and across visitor's backs) are African-Americans who actively resisted slavery. Some of them fought with John Brown at Harper's Ferry.

*To find out more about the events leading up to the Civil War, see the Civil War exhibit on the second floor.

BLUE ROOM #1

Why are there objects from Liberia next to objects made by enslaved Africans in the room?

In the 19th century Liberia was colonized by Americans as a place to which freed African-Americans could be settled. Marylanders were among the founders of the American Colonization Society in 1817 and established their own colony, Maryland in Liberia. By 1837 the colony had more than 200 people and an African-American governor, John Brown Russwurm. But most of the African-Americans with roots several generations deep in American soil did not want to "return" to a country far from their home, and the experiment failed. By placing Liberian objects next to the objects made in this country by enslaved Africans stresses the vital connection between these people and their ancestral homeland and allows us to appreciate the history of such simple and beautifully crafted objects.

BLUE ROOM #2

Why is there a computer next to Benjamin Banneker's journal?"

Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) was born a free man on a small farm outside Baltimore. Although he was known as a mathematician, surveyor and astronomer, he was almost entirely self-educated and learned to project the positions of the stars with a few books and borrowed instruments. He helped to survey the land that eventually became Washington, DC and published several almanacs that served abolitionists as examples of the equal intelligence of African-Americans. He wrote a famous letter to Thomas Jefferson arguing the cause of abolition and declaring, "Sir I freely and Chearfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race."

The computer is programmed to show the night sky on October 18, 1800, a day on which Banneker had predicted an eclipse in his journal, open on the table. On the wall to

the right are passages from the journal in which Banneker recorded his dreams, mysterious and sometimes troubled. The images projected on the wall are also from his journal and include the first page of his letter to Jefferson. The juxtaposition of the journal and the computer in this dreamlike setting connects the past to the present.

*Have you seen the picture of Banneker from his almanac in the Discover Maryland gallery on the first floor?

This education handout was developed by the joint staffs of The Contemporary and The Maryland Historical Society.

APPENDIX C: *Curators' Statements*

The following statements were printed on double-sided handouts and placed in acrylic mounts located between the elevators:

#1:

Questions

Questions are more important than answers

Questions open doors, admit possibilities, encourage options, reject absolutes.

Questions make connections.

Museums should be about questions.

I am compelled to expand the boundaries of my existence by trying to apprehend life as other individuals perceive it. My tools are questions. Questions about art and history provide me with two of the best tools.

The visual arts allow me to come close to seeing the world around me as mother sees it - to sense the dynamics which make another person who he his. I believe that visual arts opens windows into the immediate experiences of others which are opaque to the written or spoken word, to gestures, or to interactions. Art is heightened reality; artists are personal realities. the experience of art is essentially intimate.

History - not facts and dates, but the study of peoples' lives and the forces which impact them - identifies both the universal and the particular in human existence. People of the past ar "other" than I, just as people of other races, other genders, other ages, other experiences. My relationship to someone in the past is as determined by who I am and by my own experiences as is my understanding of someone I meet on the street today. The reality of the present or of the past is in my own comprehension. The study of history is only a closer and closer approximation to past reality, just as understanding another person is an exercise in accepting their essential different-ness. I understand by asking questions.

The Maryland Historical Society provides the opportunity to bring both the lens of

art and the lens of history to bear on human experience. Just as the use of the two lenses in a microscope enhances the image, so art and history together greatly expand the potential for understanding. art reiterates and reinterprets the truths formulated by the repetitive experiences of history. History gives context, dimension, and vitality to art.

Each object, new or old, inspires a multitude of questions about the lives of those who made it, used it, owned it, chose it, saved it, discarded it, exhibited it. By putting objects together in different ways the extraordinary collection of art and vast accumulation of historical artifacts, I am excited by what the manipulation of these objects in exhibitions asks. My role is to encourage others to question. The search of the Maryland Historical Society, The Contemporary, and the artist for this project enriches and enhances the search of each.

In his installation, Fred Wilson intensifies the impact aesthetic qualities, scholarly research and curatorial choices. The perceptions of an artist are in the vanguard of his culture. The questions explode. "Mining the Museum" by Fred Wilson breaks ground at the Maryland Historical Society so that growing and expanding insights and interpretations of art and history may flourish.

"Mining the Museum" is an exhibition of questions.

Questions provoke freedom.

There are no wrong questions.

Question!

Quest!

Jennifer F. Goldsborough

Chief Curator

Maryland Historical Society

#2:
"Can you see anything?"

"Yes, wonderful things."

Howard Carter upon discovering the treasures of Tutankhamen.

When Fred Wilson arrived at the Maryland Historical Society to begin preparation for Mining the Museum, he asked, "Where am I here in this painting...in this diorama...in this collection?" And, when he descended into those lower reaches of the museum, the maze of rooms invisible to the public and known as "storage", he emerged, like Howard Carter, into the light with a precious trophy -literally with Truth in his hands. The "Truth Globe" casting its shadow on empty pedestals expresses precisely the artist's quandary. What is historical Truth? Who makes it? Who writes it? Who owns it? Who values it? Who tells it? Who learns it? Who passes it on? How museum practices address these questions is central to **Mining the Museum**.

That an artist should problematize one of the most hallowed institutions of western culture is hardly new. The Futurist's bombastic proclamation to "Burn the museums!", like Duchamp's Readymades, may have been calculated to shock, but they were also intended to draw critical attention to the system of absolutes upon which museum values have been predicated. Artists have continued to consider that system by creating work resistent to the museum environment, by making museums the subject of their work, or by examining museum ideologies. It is no longer even uncommon to find an artist acting as curator.

Fred Wilson's art has typically focused on the relationship between the way museums display and contextualize cultural artifacts and the way viewers interpret these objects. In **Mining the Museum**, he cranks up his emotional pitch, generating

disturbing paradoxes and subtle but chilling ironies between texts, objects, and spaces. Blurring museum categories such as style/period, high/low art, art/artifact, self/other, Wilson's installations undermine our assumptions and expectations of museums, art, and history.

Installation as an artform has the flexibility, as critic David Deitcher has stated, "to function all at once as a means of deconstructing the museum and of reconstructing it...."(Artforum, January, 1992). There is no preface to **Mining the Museum**. The spectator, upon leaving the elevator, enters directly into the artwork. From that moment, interaction commences. Calculated to impact on our senses, this total surround disrupts the usual static experience of looking at art and catalyzes a dynamic process of questioning. At the forefront of this questioning is the issue of contextuality; what is our relationship to this environment? What is the relationship between the objects within it? What does it make us feel? What does it make us think?

"Museums," he tells us, "are places where anything can happen. Exhibitions are places where we should expect the unexpected." So, in Wilson's "exhibition" cigar store Indians turn their backs to us. A whipping post surrounded by period chairs becomes an image of violence, voyeurism and theater. Labels name the anonymous and paintings have voices. "Where did I go?," questions a child. We ask, "Why have those represented by these works been lost to us? Who is included in this history? Who is left out?" Wilson's personal vision is an attempt to redress the imbalance.

As Wilson "mined" the permanent collections, he made painful discoveries of objects like the "Naughty Nelly" boot jack and numerous manuscripts chronicling the history of slavery in this country. Unlike his past projects, Wilson could not manipulate the objects or their histories. He had to accept certain indisputable facts as to how, why,

and for whom these objects were created. It was working with the objects and in the archives that he struggled to come to terms with the answer to "Where am I here?".

Like the visitor to **Mining the Museum**, no one involved with the project in the past year, could avoid considering what it means to be a museum, a historical society, a curator, an artist, what it means to write history or be a "cultural producer". We learned how museums and museum professionals are not immune to stereotyping. We learned the importance of "re-siting" the museum as a place of debate, not of absolute judgements. We feel indebted to Fred Wilson for galvanizing a line of self-questioning which will ensure that our institutions can go forward with a continued sense of purpose and relevance.

Lisa Corrin

Assistant Director,The Contemporary

Guest Curator, **Mining the Museum**

APPENDIX D: Audience Response Form

The following questions were provided for audience comments:

PLEASE SHARE YOUR RESPONSES TO MINING THE MUSEUM

Which part of Mining the Museum did you find most powerful? Least? Why?

Could you find your own history in the installation? Where?

Did the installation make you reconsider your ideas or feelings about museums, artists, history, contemporary art...? How?

What kind of experience do you hope to have when you visit a museum?

What did you know about The Contemporary and The Maryland Historical Society before you came? Have you attended other exhibits or programs offered by either institution?

How did you hear about Mining the Museum?

Any other questions?

Who are you? The participating museums are committed to developing new audiences for their programs. Will you provide some statistical information about yourself to help us learn aboout the audience for Mining the Museum (e.g., age, city/county, ethnic background, profession, etc?)

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